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OR, KODAK KATE'S SECRET SEVEN.

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CHAPTER I.

COMING TO CORDUROY CROSSING.

"WHOA January!"

It was Deadwood Dick, Junior, who spoke.
He was mounted upon a superb horse and was
without any disguise.

Riding along at a slow-and-easy pace, he had
come to a forks where a sign on a tree caught
his eye.

The tree stood squarely between the diverging
trails, and the sign was big enough and bold
enough to draw the attention of anyone who
happened to pass along that way.

"BEHOLD!" AND WITH THAT SHE TORE AWAY HER MASK: CAPTAIN CRIMSON WAS
HIS OWN WIFE—THE MATCHLESS KODAK KATE.

There were two signs, in fact, standing one above the other. They were painted on boards, the upper one being about two feet long by six inches in width and the under one, of the same length, about a foot in width.

On the upper sign were these words:

"CORDUROY CROSSING."

That was bad enough; but the one under it was even worse, being like this:

"IF YU TAKE THE LEFT YUL BE RITE, BUT IF YU TAKE THE RITE YUL BE LEFT, SURE."

"Well, this is peculiar, anyhow," Deadwood Dick mused. "Seems to me I have seen something on the same plan before. If I take the left I'll be right, will I? I'll take the left, then, for it is the right I am after, every time; I don't want to be left."

After looking at the sign for some moments, and studying the surroundings, he drew his horse to the left and continued on his way.

"I must be nearing my destination, I take it," he reflected, as he rode on. "Corduroy Crossing can't be a great distance away. Well, I am not sorry, for I am getting rather tired of the saddle for one day. I hope I won't fall into any exciting experiences till I have rested up a little, though it will be remarkable if I don't."

The trail lay through a woodland here, and it was pleasant and refreshing compared to what it had been further back.

There was a gradual descent into a broad, wooded valley, and occasionally a glimpse of water in the distance was to be had through openings among the trees here and there.

Further back had been stretches of hot sand and dreary mountain passes, for many miles, wild, rugged and barren. The change was a welcome one to the traveler, and he seemed to appreciate it, for he removed his hat as he rode along and enjoyed the cool air.

"Yes; I must be nearly there," he said to himself again. "This is about as it was described to me; besides, the sign back there is proof of it. I shall no doubt soon strike the corduroy road, and then the camp will be at hand shortly afterward. It must be a pleasant place, I should say—that is to say, the location; the place, if report is true, is a little—Whoa, January!"

A charming personage had suddenly stepped out upon the trail in front of him, with hands uplifted as if commanding him to stop.

Breaking off in what he was saying, Dick drew rein and brought his horse to a stop at once, making a bow to the woman who thus blocked his way so authoritatively.

"Are you going to Corduroy Crossing, sir?" she asked.

She was young, not more than twenty at most, and handsome of face and form. On her head was a soft felt hat, a coat of rather masculine cut was buttoned across her breast with a single top button, and beneath that was a neat-fitting bodice of cloth, of the same dark material as her skirt; the latter falling to a point half-way between knee and ankle.

Her feet were incased in a pair of serviceable shoes, over which were a pair of closely buttoned leggings. In her hand she held a thin and pliable black cane, one that had every appearance of having a loaded head, and that would be a weapon of no insignificant nature at close quarters. This was held idly in the left hand, it being the right hand she had raised to signify her wish for the traveler to stop.

"Yes, miss; that is my destination," Dick answered.

"Do not go there, sir, if you value your life," Dick laughed lightly.

"Who could possibly want to take my life?" he asked. "I have no foes at Corduroy that I am aware of."

"Perhaps not; but you are a stranger."

"All men are strangers in a strange place, pretty lady."

A frown came upon the fair face immediately. "Do not force me to regret that I stopped you to warn you," she said. "You will do so if you speak that way again."

"Calling you pretty lady? I spoke but the truth. But, let it pass; I will not offend again. Will you tell me wherein lies the danger if I persist in going on to the camp?"

"The danger lies in the fact of your being a stranger."

"That is peculiar, truly. I take it, then, that strangers are not welcomed at the camp."

"They are not. The camp of Corduroy Crossing wants no strangers, as you will be informed if you persist in going on your way."

"Well, I shall persist in that direction, for I am going there. I thank you for the warning you have given me, and trust that I shall profit by it. I think I can take care of Number One."

A troubled look came upon the girl's face.

She had ere this lowered her lifted hand, and now she stepped forward to the rider's side.

"I hope you will heed my warning," she urged. "I heard you coming and I stepped aside here in the bushes to wait till you passed, but when I saw your face I could not allow you to go on unwarned. Will you not heed me and turn back? I know of what I speak."

"If anything in the world would change my purpose, miss, it would be you; but I seldom pay heed to warnings. I have blundered along through the world until now keeping to my own willful way, and so far have come out with a whole neck. Besides, there is no reason why any one at Corduroy Crossing should go for me, so far as I can see."

"Then my warning has been in vain?"

"Yes; so far as sending me back; but it may serve me a good turn since it has put me on my guard, so to say."

"I can read in your eyes that you have a strong will, sir. I hope no harm comes to you. I have done my duty, anyhow, and will detain you no longer."

She stepped back, making a slight bow as she indicated that he should go on.

Dick, however, was not in any hurry. He wanted to know something about this young woman before they parted.

"Pardon me, miss," he said, "but the little you have told makes me curious to learn more. Is it going too far if I inquire who you are?"

"My name, sir, is Nellie Mason," was the response, in her rich, full tone of voice. "I am better known as Nugget Nell. You can do no less, now, than to tell me who you are."

There was frankness about her, but nothing that was bold.

"You are right," Dick agreed, "I can do no less. My name is Smith Douglas, and I am a gambler-sport. I make no bones about telling, you see. I am going to Corduroy Crossing for the one purpose of skinning everybody I can. Pardon my inelegant way of expressing myself."

The young woman smiled, but in a half sad way and made response to what he had said.

"If that is your business, I have less fear for your safety," she remarked. "I will add, also, that I have been deceived in your appearance. You may find some at Corduroy Crossing who are your equals, if not superiors, at the various games of chance, and instead of skinning the camp, you may come away shorn yourself. I will detain you no longer, sir."

With a slight bow again, she turned away and walked off up the trail in the direction from which Dick had come.

The prince of Western detectives looked after her for some moments before going on himself, and as he looked, he exclaimed in thought:

"A trump, by great!"

The young woman did not once look back, and in a minute or so, a bend in the trail carried her out of sight.

"Yes, a trump," Dick muttered, half aloud, as he started forward on his way. "So, she thinks there are some at the camp who are my betters at handling the wicked pasteboards, does she? Well, she may be right; I do not claim to be invincible. But, what did she mean by saying she was deceived in my appearance? I guess I do not rightly catch on to that. Perhaps it will all come out, for I have an idea that I shall see more of Nugget Nell."

A little further on and the trail came abruptly to a marsh, where a corduroy road led the way to what seemed to be an island about a third of mile distant.

Beyond the island, at one end, could be seen the flashing waters of a lake. At the other end the trees of the island seemed to merge with those of the mainland at a distance of a mile or so.

The island, from this side, appeared to be rugged, and it was covered with a wood. Beyond the lake, at the only point where it was visible, was another wood at least two miles distant across the water. The marsh seemed to bound the island on one side and end, the lake the opposite.

Deadwood Dick observed all this quickly as he drew rein at the beginning of the corduroy road across the marsh.

He next gave his attention to the condition of the road, and observed that where it ended at the island the trail was resumed through what seemed to be a dark ravine.

While he stood there, fixing the lay of the

land upon his mind, he heard a sound as of many voices shouting, which seemed to be borne to his ears from the distant side of the island. It was like the howling of an excited mob. There was evidently excitement of some sort at Corduroy Crossing.

"I wonder what's the rumpus?" Dick questioned, as he listened. "The citizens must be enjoying a jolly drunk, or else perhaps it's a necktie party. Maybe it is something gotten up for my especial benefit, for it would be remarkable if I were to enter the camp and not get mixed up in some sort of local walk-around. Well, we'll soon see."

Touching his horse, he started forward across the log crossing that led to the delectable town of the same name.

It was a disagreeable ride, for the horse picked its way carefully at every step, evidently in fear of slipping, though the rough road seemed well made and safe.

Finally it was crossed, and the horse gave a whinny of satisfaction as it set hoof firmly upon solid ground once more. Barely had the crossing been left behind, however, when a challenge was heard.

"Whoop!" sung out a voice. "Up with yer hands, Mister Man!"

And with the command a man stepped out from the shadows of the ravine with a rifle at his shoulder.

He had the "drop," his gun covering Deadwood Dick's heart, and the redoubtable Richard had to comply with the modest request that had been made.

Coming entirely unexpected, the order took Dick by surprise, and there was no time for him to offer resistance. The man with the gun held the best hand, and Dick had no choice in the matter.

CHAPTER II.

THE TIMELY ARRIVAL.

"WELL, what's the reason?" Dick asked, coolly.

"This hyar gun o' mine is ther reason, and ther cause, too," was the reply.

And with his words, the individual took a squint along the barrel of his weapon in a dangerous way.

"Well, I don't know but that you are right," Dick agreed. "The gun is the cause; this is the effect. You have got the bulge on me this time."

"Yer kin jest bet yer life on't, traveler, an' I'm goin' ter keep et on ye, too. I want ter know who ye ar', what yer business is, an' whar ye ar' goin'. That's what I'm hyar for."

The man was a rough fellow, with a bearded, evil face, and was clad in a manner becoming his rascally looks.

"That's what you are here for, eh?"

"You bet!"

"Well, now, you see that I am peaceable enough, just suppose you point that old gun another way. I have no desire to have it aimed at me without reason. Just turn it off a point or two and we'll talk the matter over."

"I prefer ter keep et right whar et is now," was the response to that. "Yer needn't be afeerd of it's goin' off unless I mean et. Now, jest hurry up and say yer say, and I'll see about lettin' ye go past. If I don't think well of et, ye will have ter turn tail to and go back ther way ye kem."

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?"

"That's jest it. Come, now, exhibit yer bill o' health, and fool no more time about it."

"Well, fire in your questions, one at a time."

"Fust on ther count, then, who are ye?"

"My name is Smith Douglas."

"Mebby et ar'. I won't swear to et. Next, what's yer business?"

"I am a gambler and sport," was the prompt answer to that.

"Oh-ho! Wull, whar are ye goin'?"

"I'm bound for Corduroy Crossing, with the intention of skinning the camp at cards, if I can do it."

"Wull, I ber darn! Have ye got money ter lose, ef I let ye go on?"

"A little; enough for a starter, I guess."

"Wull, I reckons ye kin pass. Ther camp don't miss no chances like this hyar, and if you don't git skinned yerself it will be a wonder to me. I think ye will find Nugget Nell ready ter put up fer what yer pile is worth, if you want ter lose et."

"Nugget Nell?"

"That's what I said."

"Who is Nugget Nell?"

"Didn't ye meet a gal over on t'other side?"

"Yes."

"Wull, that was her. She's a prime angel, she is, but she kin play kyards in a way ter make yer hair curl. She's a stunner at kyards, and runs a game over at ther Howler Saloon."

"Ha! that is the situation, is it?"

Dick remembered his conversation with the young woman, and what her parting words had been.

"That's jest et," he was assured. "Yer kin pass on now, fer I guess ye are all right. Ef ye ain't, ther boyees at ther camp will see to ye, that's all."

"By the way," asked Dick, "what is all the howling about over in the direction of your camp? It seems there is something on the docket to-day, to make the citizens whoop it up so."

The shouting, alluded to before, was still going on, at intervals.

"Wull, yas, thar is a leetle bit of 'citement at ther camp ter-day, that's so. And et's all owing to a leetle mistake I made yesterday."

"Owing to a mistake you made yesterday? What do you mean by that?"

"Wull, yer see, I allowed a feller ter pass hyar, a feller what I had a leetle s'picion of anyhow, and when he got to ther camp ther boyees cluded that he was a durn Government spy; and, I guess they're goin' ter hang him. That's ther reason why I was so p'tic'lar with you. See?"

"Yes; I see. So, you don't allow Government men here, eh? That is all the better for honest men, who are trying to work out an honest living. Well, have I your permission to ride on?"

"Yes; yer kin go on an' be darn to ye."

"Thank you, sir."

The rifle was lowered, and after making an inquiry or two concerning the way, Dick rode leisurely on.

"So, it's a guarded island, is it?" he mused.

"And they are death to Government men, eh? A delightful place, truly! I am glad that I was firm in my decision against Kate's accompanying me here. But, that shouting is getting louder and more business-like, and I think I will press forward and see what is going on. Perhaps I shall have to take a hand in the proceedings."

Touching his horse, he hastened forward, and ere long came out upon the camp, which was on the sloping side of the island and facing the lake. The corduroy road was extended across another strip of marsh on the left, and disappeared finally in a wood beyond.

The trail, as it emerged from the ravine, bent toward the camp to the right, and from the camp it took another new start across the other marsh. There was no direct travel across the island that did not make the camp a sort of half-way stop as it were, as the trail plainly proved.

Dick had taken this in at a glance before he had come fully out into sight of the houses. As soon as he did come out where the whole camp was to be seen, other things claimed his attention. He took in the whole place with a single sweep of his keen eyes, but in the foreground was a picture that claimed his interest as of first importance.

Under a spreading tree was a great crowd of men, around one who was standing upon a box with a rope around his neck all ready to be launched off into the great Hence.

Without a moment's hesitation Dick gave his horse a cut and dashed forward toward the scene.

He was heard, of course, before he reached the spot, and the crowd gave him their attention.

"Hello!" cried Dick, as he drew rein, "what is the meaning of this, folkses?"

He had dashed right into the assembled mob, and stopped a few feet from the prisoner on the box, who stood facing him.

Dick noted at a glance that he was a handsome, daring-looking fellow, and that his dangerous situation had not made him quail.

"It means that I am in a pretty bad fix," the prisoner answered for himself, in easy and calm tones. "It is a case of mistaken identity, for which I must suffer."

"That's what's the difficulty, eh?" cried Dick. "What have you got to say about it, citizens? This man seems to know what he is talking about, and you don't seem to have frightened him worth a cent. Come, now, give him a show for his life, for he is a man, all through, that I can swear to!"

There was a general growl of disapproval at this, and one man in the crowd pushed to the fore.

"What darn business is it o' yourn?" he demanded. "Who be you, anyhow? Ef ye ain't

mighty keerful ye may find yerself in ther same fix. When we need any outside help ter run our business hyer, we'll send fer et."

"Well, there's no need to get your back up over it," responded Dick, coolly. "I am not going to interfere with your little party. I only called your attention to the fact that your prisoner is taking it like a brave fellow, and since he says it is a case of mistaken identity, don't you think there is just a possible doubt in the matter?"

"That's jest what ther matter is," cried the spokesman for the crowd. "He is jest so durn brave, as you call it, that we know thar ain't no mistake. We has got him dead to rights, and he is goin' ter swing. Now, I am mayor of this hyar camp, and if you don't want ter git inter trouble yerself, ye had jest better keep yer lip out of our business. We knows this hyar galoot is Deadwood Dick, Junior, ther Government detective, an'—"

"Deadwood Dick, Junior?" in genuine surprise exclaimed the horseman.

"Yas, Deadwood Dick, Junior; and all his denyin' won't save his neck."

Dick gave a light laugh, and drew around to face the crowd in front, his horse drawing closer to the prisoner as he did so.

"Why, gentlemen!" he cried, "you are making the biggest mistake you ever made in your lives. This man is not Deadwood Dick! I have seen Deadwood Dick and am not mistaken."

"What? What's that yer say?"

"I say this man is not Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Just what I have been trying to impress upon their minds, sir," observed the prisoner.

He was perfectly cool, in spite of the fact that the rope was around his neck, and that he had been close to death.

"Do yer mean ter say that's ther truth?" demanded the mayor of the camp, in much amazement, now.

"I can swear to it," was Dick's confident assurance. "I have seen Deadwood Dick more than once, and have good reason to remember him. This man is not he. If you were going to hang him on that account, let him go, by all means, if you are not willing to hang an innocent man."

"But see how durn cool he is!" the mayor called attention. "From what we have heard tell of Deadwood Dick he's the coolest cuss on earth. That's what this hyar chap kin lay claim to, I allow."

"Pshaw! Deadwood Dick may be a cool one, as they say he is; but, that does not prove that there are not other men just as cool as he. You have got the wrong pig, this time, pards—that I can swear to!"

The mayor looked around at the crowd, and as he did so Dick discovered a wonderful and startling peculiarity about him.

He had two faces—another face where the back part of his head appeared to be!

It was startling at first, but a second glance explained it.

The man was bald, as destitute of hair as a cabbage, and the back of his head was pricked with India ink in close likeness to his face on the other side.

It had been done with considerable of artistic merit, and at a little distance further away the effect would no doubt have been puzzling. As it was, Dick could not repress a smile.

The mayor had turned to look over the faces of his subjects, to gather an impression of what the general mind was upon the matter under debate, and as he turned back he saw Dick's smile and knew at once what had caused it.

"Wull, blast ye," he cried, "ye have seen suthin', have ye? Strikes ye as bein' funny, does et? Wull, et ain't funny, not a bit et ain't. Ef you was fixed that way, and had ter carry et around with ye, yer life would be a burden to ye, I'm bettin' on et."

"It certainly does strike me as funny," Dick admitted. "If I smile it is because I never saw anything of the sort before."

CHAPTER III.

A TREAT IN LIEU OF A HANGING.

Two things were very evident.

One, that the man was not responsible for his strange tattooings; the other, that he was very sensitive about it.

"Wull," the man growled, "ef ye never seen et afore, ye now see it behind. Ye kin take one good look at et, and then I don't want ter ketch ye payin' no more 'tention to et."

"That's it, eh? Well, I will try not to annoy

you by looking at your double phiz. But, if you are so mighty sore in that spot why don't you grow some hair and cover it over? Or you might keep your hat pulled down behind. Better still, get some one to take it out for you."

"See here," cried the mayor, taking a stride forward, "do you want me to yank ye down off'n that ar' hoss and wipe up ther ground with ye? I'll do et, in jest one brief minnit, ef ye don't mind. I don't take no guff from nobody, I don't. An' hyar's one thing more: I don't allow nobody ter star-gaze at my face behind, as ther boyees will tell ye, an' ef I ketch you a-doin' it I'll bring ye to 'count, sure."

"No," responded Dick, self-possessed as ever; "I don't want to be yanked off my horse, and made a duster of, so please don't do it. We'll let it drop, if you are willing, and I'll try not to trespass upon the forbidden ground—as it were. Still any one of the suggestions I have dropped is well worth being followed, especially that of raising a crop of hair and covering your decorations. There; I won't mention it again. What about the prisoner?"

The crowd had given silent attention to all this, evidently with the expectation of seeing some trouble.

For the moment, in his rage, the mayor had seemed to forget the prisoner, and Dick's remark brought his mind back to the business of the hour.

"Sure enough," he cried, wheeling around. "Ain't he swingin' clear yet, my lads? Up with him, and make short work of it, too. Et will be one suspected character ther less, anyhow."

Those who had hold upon the rope drew it tight and prepared to pull, but with a wary eye upon Deadwood Dick the real, as if expecting some interference from him; and they were not mistaken, either. Dick took a hand in the matter, as he had predicted he should have to do.

"Just go a little slow with that business, if you please!" he cried, raising his hand. "I am going to have a word to say about it. You are hanging this man because you suspect him of being Deadwood Dick, Junior. I tell you he is not that man, because I have seen Deadwood Dick too often to be mistaken. If that is the only reason you have for sending him off, don't do it. *He is not the man.*"

"But, he's a stranger, anyhow!" growled the mayor.

"What if he is? Do you make a practice of hanging strangers here? If so, it will be a first rate place for me to get out of, seeing that I am a stranger myself."

"Ther best thing ye kin do," declared the mayor, sullenly. "Strangers is not wanted hyar anyhow. Yer room is worth more than yer company. Who ar' ye, anyhow, an' what has brought ye here?"

"Questions that I do not mind answering," responded Dick. "My name is Smith Douglas, as I had to explain to your guardsman back there, and I am a gambler. I have come here for the purpose of skinning your crack players, or of dropping my pile with you, just as it happens."

"Wull, ye ar' honest about et, anyhow. You say ye kin swear that this galoot ain't Deadwood Dick, do ye?"

"Yes; positively. No chance for a mistake. I'll stake my life on it."

"Have ye ever seen ther prisoner before?"

"Never, sir."

"Is it not as I tried to convince you?" the prisoner remarked. "It is lucky for me you happened along, Mr. Douglas, or I might now be swinging."

"It seems they would have hanged you for Deadwood Dick. You must have a grudge against that gentleman, mayor. It wouldn't be a healthy place for him to visit, I take it."

"You kin jest bet yer left et wouldn't!" asserted the mayor.

"And, by the same token, it is just the place for me to hang up my hat for a time. I have no desire to fall in with Deadwood Dick just now."

"How kin we swear that ye ar' tellin' us ther plain truth?" demanded the mayor. "Mebby you two ar' in cahoots, an' you ar' lyin' fer yer pard. Mebbly it's a put-up game all around."

"It came near to being a string-up game for me," spoke the prisoner. "If your suspicion were correct it would show that we made a poor mess of it, wouldn't it? Does it look like the work of Deadwood Dick? I argue not."

"You have made your mistake this time, mayor," declared Dick, decisively. "This man, as I have asserted, is not Deadwood Dick, Junior. If you know anything about Dick and his methods, you ought to be aware that he general-

ly enters a camp in disguise, if he has business there. That is the way you want to look for him."

"See hyar," the mayor demanded, "whar did you last see Deadwood Dick, sence you know him so well."

"I saw him at Mexican Mustang, sir, where he came disguised as a Quaker, or something of that sort. If he ever pays you a visit he won't leave any room for mistake, if he can help it, you may be sure."

"Wull, boyees, sence ther proof seems good, ye kin let ther prisoner go."

"An' that 'ar robs us of our fun," one man growled.

"No matter," rejoined the mayor. "If they don't carry themselves mighty straight thar may be a double hangin' fore long."

With a good deal of muttered disapproval, the men nearest the prisoner cast the rope from his neck and freed his hands, when he stepped forward and extended his right to Dick.

"We are strangers, Mr. Douglas," he said, "but you have done me a good turn, and if I can ever return the compliment I shall be only too happy to do so, though I hope it won't be a favor of the same kind exactly. It's rather trying on the nerves."

"One would not imagine that you are fixed out with nerves, like other folks," observed Dick, as they shook hands. "Or, perhaps you are all nerve. Certainly you took your bad fix coolly enough. No; I hope you'll never be called upon to perform a similar service for me. May I ask your name?"

"My name is Carlo Waterstone, sir. Like yourself, I am a child of leisure; that is to say, a sport."

"I do not lay claim to being a sport," Dick refuted. "I am a gambler pure and simple."

"Well, it is a distinction without much of a difference, I surmise."

"Perhaps you are right; I won't dispute."

A man in the crowd now spoke up.

"Et hits me hard," he said, "that somethin' 'ar wantin' ter make this hyar job complete. We have been robbed of our fun; hadn't somebody better treat?"

"Whoop!" cried the crowd. "That's ther idee, boots an' all! Whose treat is et? Ther man what got saved, or ther man what saved him? Whoop 'er up, boyees, fer a treat all around."

"I suppose I ought to stand this," said Waterstone. "If you will give me back my money and weapons, gentlemen, we'll adjourn to the Howler and do the proper thing in honor of the occasion. I hold no malice toward you, though I hope you will be a little more sure of your man another time."

His things were restored to him, and the crowd set off in the direction of the Howler Saloon, the double-faced mayor leading the way.

Dick had not dismounted, and when the saloon was reached he rode right in.

This feat was nothing new for him, but it was evidently a novelty for the citizens of Corduroy Crossing.

The mayor brought his genuine face around to bear upon him, having secured a place at the bar, and stared at him in a manner that was full of interest.

While the crowd was taking advantage of the free poison, Dick was running his keen eyes over the assemblage as a whole, and he came to the conclusion that it was about as villainous a gang as he had ever seen in his life.

"Are you not going to take something, Mr. Douglas?" asked Waterstone, seeing that Dick had not indulged when the crowd began to thin out.

"Not this time, thank you," was Dick's answer. "I am more in need of something solid. I suppose you have a hotel here, eh, mayor?"

"Bet yer life on't!" was the prompt response.

"Where is it?"

"Jest a leetle furdur 'round by ther lake."

"Good enough; I think I'll drop around there and see about getting accommodations."

"And perhaps I'll see you again," said Waterstone, "if the boys don't take it into their heads to string me up a second time. I'm stopping there."

"All right, we'll have a chat after awhile. Won't you join us, mayor? You can probably hold up your end in a three-handed game at talk. I'm curious to hear your story, you know."

The mayor frowned.

"I don't believe you'd find me 'greeable company," he declared. "I don't set up ter tie to strangers at short notice. As fer my story, anybody hyar kin tell ye all about Double-face Duncan. Et ain't no secret, but nobody talks

about et in my presence. Et ain't healthy ter do so, as they all knows."

And with that he turned away and took a seat.

With a passing remark to the crowd, Dick turned and rode out.

He followed down the street, which turned toward the lake, and soon saw the hotel.

It was a house better than the usual sort in wild camps, and over its door was a sign announcing its name as the—

"BANG-UP HOTEL."

"Just the sort of house I want to find," mused Dick. "If it is as bang-up as the rest of the camp it is no doubt a hummer. It is a hard place, if indications count for anything."

The hotel faced the lake, very properly, and had a piazza on that side.

Dick stopped at what was the side entrance, which opened into the bar-room, and dismounted and went in.

Nobody was present but the landlord, a tall, lean fellow of forty years. All the camp had been at the hanging, and were now around the saloon.

The landlord's name was Tripham Marker, and he was about as homely, as a man, as ever lived. He was an Irishman by birth, but one who had spent his years in New England, and hence was called the "Irish Yankee."

Dick greeted him in a hearty way.

"Any room for one more?" he asked. "Can you give me accommodations for self and horse?"

"I can that same, sir," was the response, in a speech that smacked as much of Yankee drawl as it did of Irish brogue.

The important fact ascertained, Dick registered and became a guest of the house, and when he had seen his horse taken away he fell into conversation with his host.

CHAPTER IV.

GOING FOR RICHARD.

THE door by which Dick had entered the hotel was not the main one. That opened upon the piazza, also from the bar-room, but as the side-door was nearest the rest of the camp, that was the one most generally used.

This hotel, by the way, had been built when the place was enjoying its boom, as all new places do, and before its mining interests had petered out and left the camp stranded. This was the reason why it faced the lake instead of being grouped with the rest of the camp further back. It was also the reason why it was a little larger than the average of its kind in the usual Western camp. Its builders had expected the place to become a city in a short time.

When Dick and the landlord fell into conversation they stepped out upon the piazza, where a splendid view of a charming lake was had, proof that the builders of the hotel knew what they were doing when they chose the site.

The lake seemed to be two or three miles wide, by several more in length, to judge by the portion that could be seen, and was as splendid a little body of water as any one could desire.

"You have a fine location here," Dick remarked.

"A fine one, indeed, sir," was the agreeing response.

"If the camp were only as good as the surroundings, eh?" Dick hinted.

"If it was only half as good, sir," was the response.

"You speak as though it might be better than it is."

"No more than you did yourself, sir. You can see what it is for yourself."

"I pretty rough hole, I take it to be, but that's all right. I suppose there are worse places."

"I have heard of one that is worse, sir, but no need to mention it. I have never been there, and those who do go never come back again."

Dick laughed lightly.

"You are too rough on your camp," he said. "Why do you stay here, if you consider it such a terrible place as all that seems to indicate?"

"Faith, me interests is in this hotel, and I have to make it turn a dollar if it will. But, then, the place isn't so bad as you might think, sir. The devil's own fine time the boys have once in a while."

Dick caught on at once, so to say.

He saw that the man was trying to remove the bad impression he had made.

"You look at it in two ways, then," Dick observed.

"Yes; and why not? For a lot of rough men, what's the odds what for a place it is? For ladies and childer it would be all that I said of it, and more. It took a big tumble when the mines played out."

"So, the mines are all played out, are they?"

"Every wan of them, sir."

"Then what keeps the camp up?"

"Oh, it's the panning, mostly, sir."

"Most camps die right out when the mines shut down."

"Begorra, so did this, too, for it is only a ghost of what it was, sir."

"I see," returned the new-comer, whether he saw or not.

Perhaps he saw far more than any one suspected, and especially his host.

Some business had brought him to this camp of Corduroy Crossing, whatever it might be, and his questions had an object behind them.

"By the way," Dick presently remarked, when he had lighted a cigar and offered one to the landlord, "your mayor is remarkably embellished with an extra face."

"He is that same," responded Marker, with a laugh. "And mighty touchy he is about it, too. If any one pays too much attention to it he gets mad and is likely to knock him down."

"So I discovered, when I took a look at it myself. It was surprising to me, and I could not help looking. How did it come there? I imagine he would not tell the story himself."

"Neither he would, sir. There are enough others to tell it for him, I suppose he thinks. Would ye care to hear about it?"

"Certainly; that's why I asked."

"Well, you see the mayor is a hard drinker, at times. He'll go for weeks and never a drop will he touch; but then of a sudden off he goes and gets so blind stavin' drunk that he won't know any'ting for a couple of days or more."

"Goes on benders, eh?"

"That's what you might call them, sir. Well, you know he is baldheaded. Devil a bit more hair is there on his head than there is on a billiard ball. One night, so the story goes, when he was so dead drunk that he didn't know what his name was, a fellow went to work and made an India ink picture of his face on the back part of his head, just as you see it to-day."

"There must have been a lively time when he found it out."

"I suppose there was. Anyhow, it wouldn't wash off, and so they came to call him Double-face Duncan, the name he bears now."

"It was rather rough on him, that's the truth. But, about this fellow they were about hanging when I came along: Who and what is he, and why did they want to swing him off?"

"Who and what he is sir, I don't know. He claims to be a sport, or something in that line. The boys took him for Deadwood Dick, an' that's why they were about sending him off. I saw you interfere and save him."

"I was able to tell them he was not Deadwood Dick, for I know that individual. Tell me, though, why do they want to put Deadwood Dick out of the way?"

"Because they don't want him prying around here, sir."

"Then the island has secrets, has it?"

"Perhaps; it's not for me to say."

"Well, you needn't. It will be a good place for me to hang up for a little while, I fancy. But, what's the rumpus, I wonder? The crowd seems to be coming this way."

"I give it up, sir. They do seem to be bearing this way, that's the truth of it. Let's be after seeing."

By stepping to the end of the piazza they could look up the street toward the center of the town.

The whole camp seemed to be coming toward the hotel, in something of a hurry.

They were talking and shouting in loud tones, and it was evident that something had gone wrong with them.

Deadwood Dick took a sly look to see that his weapons were in prime order, believing that whatever the excitement was about he was going to take part in it.

"They seem to mean business, for a fact," declared the landlord. "Let's go through the bar-room and meet them. I don't want them to come in if I can help it. I am not prepared to entertain mobs."

"Come along," assented Dick. "No doubt they'll pretty soon let us know what is in the wind."

They left the piazza and went through to the side entrance; just in time to meet the foremost of the mob.

Leading the van was Double-face Duncan, the mayor, who had weapons in hand, all ready for business.

At his heels came the denizens of Corduroy, crowding one upon another in their mad desire to keep up with the mayor, each man desirous of being first.

Among the rest was Carlo Waterstone, the man whose life Dick had saved, and who now had a look of alarm upon his handsome face, as though there was further danger for somebody.

As said, Dick and the landlord were just in time to meet the foremost, and that was the mayor.

"Up with yer hands, you son of a tinker!" the mayor cried, presenting his weapons at Dick's head.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dick, coolly, yet with evident surprise, "what is the matter now, mayor? What has gone wrong with you?"

"We'll show ye what's wrong," was the angry retort. "Up with them 'ar hands, I say, or by ther 'ternal goshness ef I don't bore ye and have done with et!"

"Well, now, this is something of a surprise party," Dick parleyed, coolly as ever. "I'd like to know what is the trouble before I fall in with the procession. If you assure me it's all right, why that will make it so, I suppose."

"Consarn ye! ar' ye goin' ter elevate them 'ar hands? Ef ye don't do et in jest one holy second, by the 'ternal goshness ef I don't make a clean wipe-out of ye, and you'll never know what hit ye. I'm a dead shot, and I can't miss ye at this range. Up with 'em, an' then I'll 'splain."

"Mayor, you are pushing things too fast," Dick argued, while he did not offer to obey the command. "If you want to kill me, blaze away; but only a coward would do that, and I don't believe you are one. Can't you tell me what has got you by the ear? What has sent you here in this warlike array? What have I done to get your dander up in this style?"

"Cuss ye fer yer coolness!" the mayor cried. "Ain't et so, boyees? Ain't he even more cool 'an t'other one? Thar's no mistake, you bet!"

"Nary a mistake!" echoed the crowd. "It looks to me as though there must be a big mistake," observed Dick. "You seem inclined to go for me, I see. Now, I demand to know what the dickens it is all about."

His tone and change of manner went to show that he was waking up. While still perfectly cool, there was a showing of anger that, had they known their man, would have warned them to go slow.

"Yer demands ter know, do ye?" cried the mayor. "Well, et ar' soon told to ye. You ar' Deadwood Dick, and we knows et, and we means ter hev ye, dead or alive. Do ye ketch on to that 'ar?"

Dick forced a laugh.

"Well, what has come over you, anyhow?" he demanded. "Are you a lot of crazy loons? You seem to think everybody is Deadwood Dick just now. Isn't there some one else around you might bring the same charge against? You are 'way off the track, pards."

"Yer will have to prove et, ef we are," declared the mayor, peremptorily.

"Can you prove that I am Deadwood Dick? If you can, that will settle it; if you can't, then that ought to settle it."

"So you say. We don't keer a good deal whether we kin prove et or not. Ef you can't prove otherwise et is goin' ter go hard with ye, that ye kin bet."

"Well, upon what grounds do you bring your charge that I am Deadwood Dick? I am getting interested. In what manner do I lead you to suspect that I am the rampant Richard of Deadwood? Spit it right out."

"Well, ter begin with, you ar' about as cool as he is said to be, and from fall 'counts must look somethin' like him. Then, at ther Howler Saloon ye wouldn't take yer bitters with there rest of ther crowd, and we hev heard tell that Deadwood Dick has gone back on likker and never touches a drop. Thar ye bev et, a good, strong case!"

CHAPTER V.

RICHARD'S BIG BLUFF.

DEADWOOD DICK laughed lightly and slipped his hands carelessly into his pocket.

"Mayor," he said, "you are fooling yourself in a worse way than to eat sawdust and call it corn meal. If I wanted to drink, you may safely bet your life I would drink."

"Yas; but the trouble is yer don't want ter, an' yer don't mean ter do et; an' that's what we has ter say. Yer is Deadwood Dick, and thar ain't no gettin' out of et."

"Your proof is too thin," declared Dick. "It

won't hold color. Only a little while ago you were sure that Mr. Waterstone here was Deadwood Dick, and now you are sure that I am he. The trouble is, mayor, you are off the track. You are only guessing."

"Be ye goin' ter put up yer hands?"

"What's the use? You have got the drop on me, and I am not kicking, am I? If you want to shoot me, bore away!"

"By the 'ternal goshness ef you ain't got a narve! Et's a pity ter have ter shoot ye down like a dog, I swear et is. I don't want ter do et."

"Don't do it, then, by any means. I am willing to excuse you. If I put up my hands, though, what do you intend doing with me then? Going to hang me up like a horse-thief as you were serving Mr. Waterstone, eh?"

"We're willin' ter give ye a fair trial."

"Oh, are you? Well, let me make a proposition to you, will you?"

"What is et?"

"You believe that I am Deadwood Dick?"

"Yes; you bet."

"But, you can't prove it."

"Kin you prove ye ain't?"

"No; for I am a stranger to you all."

"Well, then, what's yer proppyzishun?"

"It is this: I have no intention of running away, and I want you to let me enjoy the freedom of the camp."

"That's cool, anyhow."

"Maybe it is; but, listen: I have reasons for wanting to keep clear of the real Deadwood Dick, and I think we can work together pretty well. You don't know Dick and I do."

"Well?"

"If he gets on track of me he will most likely follow me here, see?"

"I hear what ye say, anyhow."

"That's enough. Well, if he comes I can point him out to you, and then you can do the rest. There's no use your hanging a dozen or two until you get the right man, for that will be only a waste of life."

"Do ye mean that as real business?"

"Of course I do. If you could rid me of Deadwood Dick, you would be doing me the biggest favor imaginable."

"What do ye say, boyees?"

The mayor turned to the crowd, and his double face came around facing Dick.

It was a curious sight, and it seemed as though the men behind him were still seen by him even while he looked another way.

Good stories were told about the mayor and his double face. It was said that it had once saved his life, when a fellow with murderous intent sneaked up behind him to drive a knife into his back. The assassin was about to strike, when suddenly he saw the eyes looking straight at him, and with a gasp he dropped his knife and fled in terror from the spot. The mayor's burden was not altogether to his disadvantage, it seemed.

"Et hits me hard that et would be a good idee ter put 'em both on ther rope," spoke up one man, in response to the mayor's call for opinions.

"That would wipe out ther doubt right at oncet," added another. "We kin look out fer Deadwood Richard ourselves, and we kin hang jest as many off-color galoots as happens along."

"Which would be rather rough on the innocent ones," argued Dick.

"I can't agree cheerfully to any such plan as that," put in Waterstone with a grim smile. The crowd laughed.

"Then there is another thing to take into consideration," added Dick.

"What ar' that?" demanded the mayor.

Of a sudden Dick's hands flashed to the fore, and a pair of glittering five-shooters covered the mayor and the crowd.

The opportunity for which he had been waiting had come, for he had caught the mayor just enough off his guard to get the drop on him and so reverse the order of advantage.

"It is just this," Dick went on, quietly. "If you insist upon carrying out your idea, mayor, there is going to be the liveliest kind of a ruction here, and somebody is going to get hurt. I have got the drop just now. Don't move a finger, if you value your good health."

The mayor could only stare in his amazement.

"I am not slow to shoot, if I am not Deadwood Dick," the detective answered, "and I don't waste many shots when I mean business. Now, you have brought this thing to just this point. It's either peace or war, just as you please."

"Yes; and I feel that I have reason to chip in here, too," declared Waterstone, stepping to

Dick's side with weapons in hand. "Now, citizens, what is it to be? We don't want trouble, but you can bet your boots you are not going to hang us for somebody else without a kick on our part."

The mayor put away his weapons with deliberation.

He was making a virtue of grim necessity, for he saw there was danger in any other course.

"I don't see but we might as well have peace," he said, "and take these fellers at their word. As long as thar is a reasonable doubt, we might ez well give 'em ther bennyfit of et."

"Then you will leave us alone, will you?" asked Dick.

"Yas, only ef we git more proof we'll go fer ye in 'arnest, you bet!"

"That is all right; you are welcome to. And now I'll stick to what I said. If Deadwood Dick shows up here, and I get onto his disguise, I'll point him out to you. Isn't that fair, boys?"

"Et looks fair enough."

"And I'll stand by it, too. It is putting in one lick for you and two for myself, as it were."

"All right; but ye don't want ter think that ye hev disarmed all our s'ptions against ye, fer ye haven't. If we gits ye dead to rights et is goin' hard with ye."

"All right; I'm ready to stand it, Mr. Duncan."

Weapons were put away.

"Hyar is all our fun sp'iled again," complained the man who had raised the same objection before. "Seems like we don't git no show fer a little jollyfercation."

"An' it hits me that somebody'd orter treat ergain," put in the fellow who had proposed that thing before.

"All right, boys, I'll stand that for you this time," offered Dick. "Here, landlord," tossing a double-eagle to Tripham Marker, "take the boys in and poison them in good style. If that don't cover it, charge the balance to my account."

This was a stroke of business which the "Irish Yankee" could not despise, so he invited the crowd to step right up and sample his wares.

The Bang-up Hotel was a little out of the swim, with its bar, the Howler Saloon, being in the center of the camp, catching the lion's share of the trade; and this was a nugget.

The crowd pushed in, and Dick and Waterstone passed through to the piazza.

"They seem to be trying to make it interesting for us," Waterstone observed, with a smile.

"Decidedly so," agreed Dick. "It won't be their fault, either, if they don't hang us yet. This is a deuce of a bad hole, Waterstone."

"I agree with you in both remarks," was the rejoinder.

"What can be the reason they are so set against Deadwood Dick?"

"Deadwood Dick ought to be best able to answer that," was the quiet response, and the man looked Dick squarely in the eyes.

"Perhaps so," returned Dick, "but I don't care about hunting him up to inquire. I merely question out of curiosity."

"Do you mean to insist to me that you are not Deadwood Dick?"

"Pshaw! Have you got that in your head, too?"

"I certainly have, sir."

"Then you had better get it out again. What makes you think I am Deadwood Dick?"

"About the same things in general that made the crowd think so. I am not in lack of nerve, as perhaps you saw, but you have pounds to my ounces, so to say."

Dick smiled. "You have a high opinion of me in that respect," he said.

"I have seen what you are. Why, I expected that mob would string you up before you could say a word."

"Maybe they would, too, if I hadn't bluffed them as I did. A mob has no head to speak of, and anything will turn them if it is rightly applied."

"You turned that one. But, since you do not seem inclined to take me into your confidence, will you allow me to inquire what business has brought you here to this wild hole?"

"And yet you invite me to take you into my confidence, sir. I must tell you as I told the crowd, that I am here for the purpose of making or breaking; and that is to say, I am going to gamble with anybody who has got a dollar to risk. Perhaps you will take a hand."

"I don't know about that. Since we are both here for about the same purpose, it would hardly pay for us to play at dog eat dog, do you think so?"

"Maybe not."

"You asked me a question."

"And you evaded an answer. What think you?"

"Well, I am of the opinion that this camp has reason to fear Deadwood Dick."

"That is plain, right on the face of it. That is why they would have hanged us. They have some reason to fear him."

"Evident enough. What do you say if we join hands and sift the thing as far as we can, and learn what sort of villainy is at work here, anyhow. It might pay."

"I am with you in that, or anything that offers a little excitement. Since they accuse us of being Deadwood Dick, we may as well have the game as the name, as the saying has it."

They shook hands upon it. A little time later the crowd went off toward the Howler, when Dick and his unknown ally sought the dining-room, where an early supper was ready for them.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK'S PLAN MISCARRIES.

WHILE Deadwood Dick and Carlo Waterstone had joined issues for the occasion, they did not seem to get much of a hold upon each other's confidence.

Dick certainly did not tell the other who he was, and he doubted very much whether Waterstone had told him a straight story concerning himself. One seemed to be as cautious as the other.

After supper they sat on the piazza of the Bang-up and smoked till night came on, and while they had talked during all that time, neither was yet able to form much of an idea concerning the other's true character and business. About the only thing they did fully understand was that each might depend on the other in case of need.

Finally they left the hotel and sauntered up in the direction of the Howler Saloon.

The camp was now lighted up, and the business of the night was begun.

Entering the saloon, the first face to catch their sight was the double face of the camp's worthy mayor.

He was standing at the bar with his back toward the door, and was the man the nearest to them as they stepped within.

It would have been easy for him to conceal his disfigured occiput by simply pulling his hat down behind, but he did not do it.

He wore his hat about as high up behind as he did in front. Perhaps the double face had served him so well on one occasion that he had faith that it might answer the same purpose again.

An exclamation by some one in the crowd, when the two stepped in, caused the mayor to turn immediately and face them.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "hyar you aire, hey?"

"Here we are," Dick responded.

"And ye seem ter be as chummy as two pards of long standin', too," was the comment.

"Circumstances threw us together and made us have a sort of fellow feeling for each other, as it were," explained Waterstone.

"A feller feelin', hey? Feller feelin' is good. You want to carry yerselves mighty straight hyar in this camp, howsever, or you may find a feller feelin' fer his gun."

"Thank you for the warning," said Dick. "We don't expect to run counter to any of the rules and regulations of your camp, mayor, so do not be uneasy. That is to say, I do not. I speak only for myself."

"And I can assure you of the same on my part," Waterstone hastened to add.

Just then there came upon their ears a something that was like unto a commingled bellow, roar and howl.

A big, rough, shock-headed giant of a fellow came pushing his way from the rear of the saloon, where was a partition shutting off another room.

In that partition, to describe it in a moment, was a double green door, closed but not secured, and over it in plain letters was the name of the gambler queen whom Dick had met that day in the woods—

"NUGGET NELL."

But, to tell of the big bullwhacker.

On he came, flourishing his arms wildly and bellowing loudly, though at first his intention was not quite plain.

If not so at first, he soon made it plain, for, as he came nearer, he thrust his long arms up and out, spread his legs wide apart, and shouted in a terrible voice:

"Hyar's ther chance fer Bleezer Googin ter exercise his muscle! Two strangers tergether, and two makes a pair, b'goshtum! They say a

ace can't beat a pair, nohow, but right hyar's ther ace what kin beat this pair, and don't ye forgit et! Whoop!"

Then he bellowed, shook his head like a mad buffalo, and advanced.

"Ef ye vally yer lives, strangers," warned the mayor, "ye had better git right out o' hyar and dust back to ther hotel."

"Don't let 'em do et," cried the bullwhacker. "Don't rob me of ther only good chance fer a leetle fun I have had in six months. Come right up, ye rascals, and see me stand ye on top of yer heads afore ye kin wink. D'ye hear me yaup? Whoop!"

"Are you talking to me?" asked Dick.

"That's what I am, bubby," was the retort.

"And you are spoiling for fight?"

"Sp'ilin'! Darn et, I am wuss'n sp'ilin' ready. Which one of you two is et they say is Deadwood Dick?"

"I happen to be the last one who had the honor to be suspected of being that gentleman," was Dick's composed reply.

"Then you are the hairpin I am lookin' fer, b'goshtum! I have heard tell a good deal about you, me hearty, and I've allus wanted ter have a go at ye."

"But, I'm not Deadwood Dick," Dick declared. "Not Deadwood Dick?"

"No; it was all a mistake. Ask your mayor here."

"Was et a mistake, Double-face? Was et?" the fellow demanded.

"We wasn't able ter prove et, if that's what ye mean," was the mayor's reply.

"Couldn't prove et, hey? I'm glad ter hear that. I want ter have a go with him, jest fer fun. Sonny, I'm goin' ter spank ye!"

Deadwood Dick thought he smelled a rat. It had been made plain that the general character of Deadwood Dick was not unknown here at Corduroy Crossing. Was not this a dodge to get him into a fight to prove his prowess? If he was able to floor this big bluffer, would it not be further proof that he was Deadwood Dick?

"You don't mean to say you are going to jump me, do you?" Dick asked, with a little showing of alarm.

"Jump ye! Bless yer innercent heart, et has allus been my desire ter take a fall out of Deadwood Dick, and if you're ther man, why—"

"But I tell you I am not—"

"Thar seems ter be a doubt, an' as I'm jest dyin' ter lick somebody I'm goin' ter take ther bennyfit of ther doubt. Come right out hyar, now, and git chawed."

Dick knew he could whip this whacker. He had met dozens just like him, but, if he wanted to give weight to the impression that he was not Deadwood Dick, it would not do to show his ability as an athlete.

"But, my good man," he protested, "I have no quarrel with you, and it is as plain as day that you can whip me. You are bigger than I am everyway."

"No matter; I'm goin' ter do et jest ther same. If I do you up easy, I'll then tackle both of ye at oncet. Whoop! I'm in fer fun an' I'm goin' ter have et, too! No holdin' Bleezer Googin when he gits his war-paint on."

"I told ye ye had better git," the mayor warned again.

"No; I'm not built that way," averred Dick. "I'm not exactly a coward, even if I am sure of a whipping."

"Then ye owns up that I kin do it, do ye?" cried the bullwhacker. "That robs et of half ther fun, right at oncet. I don't like ter go in on a sartin thing."

"It will be a certain thing, sir, if size goes for anything. Come, now, let me stand treat, and so call it square. I don't want to fight, and am no fighter, anyhow. Come, what do you say?"

"Nary, sir, nary! I'm on ther rampage fer blud, and I must have et! Put up yer hands an' do ther best ye kin. I'm comin' fer ye now, and I'm goin' ter land ye on yer back ther very fu'st crack. Whoop! Clear ther track, now!" and with a wild flourish of his arms, then, in he sailed.

Dick could have floored him with a single blow, as he well knew; but it would not do.

He let the fellow come close to him, parried one or two of the blows aimed at his face, and then let one strike him on the shoulder with considerable force.

Over Dick went, on his back, and came almost turning a complete somerset backward, while the crowd jeered and hooted wildly, inviting him to get up and get the rest of it, and so on.

Waterstone looked at Dick with something akin to disappointment in his face.

"Git up hyar," roared the bullwhacker. "Git up and git ther other piece. I have got some

more left, and ye may as well have ther hull lot at ther same price while ye are about et. Whoop! Come right to time, Sally. Ther band is playin' now."

Dick got up slowly and shook his head.

"That's enough," he declared. "I know it's no use."

"Enough! Bless yer innercent heart, sonny, I ain't begun ter lick ye yet, I ain't. I must have jest one more crack at ye, jest fer luck."

And with that he advanced.

"See here," suddenly cried Waterstone, stepping in his way, "if you want to tackle anybody, tackle me. That man saved my life this afternoon, and I'm not going to stand by and see you thump him for nothing."

"Ho-ho!" cried Mr. Googin, stopping short and making a terrible face at his new antagonist; "you want some of et, do ye? Wull, et makes no difference ter me, long as I git ther fun. Put up yer hands and git ready. I'll give ye a fair show fer yer money, anyhow."

Waterstone faced him, in the right attitude for business.

Deadwood Dick did not like this state of affairs at all. It was just possible that Waterstone could whip the bravo, and what then?

If Dick's suspicion were true, would the crowd not set up the shout at once that he must be Deadwood Dick, in spite of all? then they would be taken and lynched at once.

Perhaps, for Dick was ready to fight in earnest, if it came to that, and it would be only by overpowering force of numbers that he and Waterstone could be overcome, after they had emptied their weapons. Then the thought, was it worth while to fight at all?

"Are ye ready?" cried the bullwhacker.

"All ready," was the cool response. "Wade in, if you must fight."

The fellow "waded," as invited, and the next he knew he was spinning toward the other end of the room.

Had a mule kicked him fairly he could not have been knocked out more promptly, and it was something that made the crowd open their eyes with wonder.

Dick wished he could have given his friend the warning tip, but it was too late now, and whatever was to come of it he must be ready to face the storm and do the best he could under the circumstances.

Whoever this stranger was, he was a man of no mean caliber, as Dick now knew. How would it terminate?

The crowd was shouting wildly, and "Deadwood Dick" was heard on more than one man's lips.

Bleezer Googin speedily got upon his feet, glared around him in a dizzy way for a second, and then rushed to the attack again.

"I'm comin' fer yer life this hyar time," he bellowed. "No man kin do that ter Bleezer Googin and live. Whoop! Speak fer yer coffin, stranger, quick. Hyar's death on a pale hoss right on yer track!"

CHAPTER VII.

IN A PRETTY TIGHT FIX.

MR. GOOGIN's opponent did not seem to be badly frightened, and Dick had to admire his courage, and the manner in which he faced his foe.

Dick doubted if he could have done any better himself. There the man stood, with arms up in the true fistic style, as cool as a March morning.

On came the bullwhacker, regardless of consequences. And even a sounding thump on the proboscis did not stop him, so hard was he coming.

Waterstone got in yet another, but had to fall back under the rush, and as he did so his heel caught against something and he went down on his back, with the howling giant on top of him and making for his throat in a desperate way.

It was now Dick's turn again.

"Come, none of that, you ruffian!" he cried. "Let the man up and fight him fairly or not at all."

"Nary a let up!" cried Googin. "I've got him hyar, and hyar I mean ter keep him. I'll settle wi' you when I'm done wi' him, too, and don't ye forget—"

Seeing that he was bent upon choking Waterstone, Dick laid hold upon his collar and jerked him to his feet.

"You wouldn't let up, eh?" he cried. "I'll show you about that!"

Mr. Googin made a brave struggle to get hold of Dick and overcome him, but he could not do it.

No sooner was Waterstone freed than he was

upon his feet, and demanded to be allowed to finish the job he had begun.

"Never mind it now!" rejoined Dick, without effort. "I will finish him up, now that I have got hold of him. It won't take me long."

"Et won't take ye long, won't et!" cried the bullwhacker. "I'll show ye about that 'ar! I'll chaw ye all up afore I am done with ye, and yer—"

"That will do," interposed Richard, giving him a shake. "Will you behave yourself if I let up on you? If not, which window do you prefer to make your exit at?"

Dick Bristol, as we know, was a man of almost superhuman strength, and having the vantage hold of Mr. Googin, that gentleman was helpless in his hands.

Waterstone looked on in amazement. For the first time it occurred to him that perhaps his friend had not tried before to overcome the big ruffian.

"Yas; I'll behave myself when I have laid you out," the whacker howled. "I ain't done with ye yet. Let up an' give me a fair show, and see if I don't put ye on yer back in jest about ther shortest—"

"Oh! you are blowing," returned Dick. "You had a chance to do that when I first tackled you. Why didn't you do it then? Come, have you made your choice of the windows? If not, I'll pitch you out the nearest one. Say quick, if you have any preferences."

"Yer can't do et, blast ye!"

"I'll try and convince you otherwise. Here you go!"

With a wonderful showing of muscular power, Dick whirled him around, swung him clear, and the next instant hurled him forward.

The man struck the window with a crash; the sash and glass flew into a thousand fragments, and out went Bleezer Googin into the darkness on the other side.

The crowd gave a wild shout, and as Dick turned to look for his friend and ally, a surprise met him.

There stood the mayor, with half a dozen or so of his followers, with their revolvers presented at his, Dick's, head.

"Up with yer hands!" commanded the mayor. "If ye don't, by the 'tarnal goshness ef we don't make mincemeat of ye! We mean et this time, and no foolin'."

There was no doubting 'it, and there was no chance to get out.

Already as many more had Waterstone a prisoner, and he was standing with his arms held by two men on each side of him.

In the same moment Dick was in the same fix, and both were helpless in the hands of that wild mob of Corduroy Crossing, the worst place in all the wild and woolly West.

"What do ye think of et now, Deadwood Dick?" the mayor demanded. "Ye can't fool us no more after that. Ha! ha! Et was a nice little trick, and et worked to a charm. Ha! ha!"

"Well, what's on the programme now?" demanded Dick, still as cool as ever.

"We ruther think a leetle hangin'-bee will be about ther proper caper now," spoke up one man.

And the mayor agreed that that would be about the right thing, under the circumstances, and suggested that the sooner it came off the better.

Long ere this the players and lookers-on in the gambling room had come out into the saloon, and among them was Nugget Nell, the gambler queen. Her face was slightly pale.

She gave no attention to Waterstone, but her gaze seemed fixed upon Deadwood Dick, and her manner was slightly nervous.

The hands of both men had now been bound, and they were prisoners indeed.

"Hello, there, stranger!" Nugget Nell called out to Dick.

Dick glanced around, and seeing who it was, responded.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "You are the lady I met in the woods."

"You bet," was the rejoinder. "You made your boast that you were coming here to skin the place. You don't seem to be in a fair way for doing it just now."

"That is the way it looks, certainly," Dick admitted. "Fate seems to be against me just now. I am sorry, too, for I wanted to tackle your game, after I learned that you had a game here."

"And I am sorry I cannot have the honor of accommodating you and relieving you of your surplus wealth. But, the camp will pr. fit by it when you have been swung up. By the way, have you any last word to leave to anybody?"

"Are you honest in that?" Dick asked.

"Honest in what, sir?"

"Your offer to accept a message from me."

"To be sure I am. If you have anything to say, the boys will let you step here and say it, seeing that your hands are tied and you can't get away."

Somehow Dick felt that there was an object back of all this, so he made the request.

"What do you say, mayor?" he demanded. "May I say something to this young woman, since it seems pretty certain that you mean business with me?"

"Yas; yer kin say what ye pleases to her, inside of two minutes," the mayor gave leave. "Let him go, boyees, and keep yer eye on him ter see that he don't git no chance ter break fer ther door."

"No fear of my trying that," assured the prisoner.

He was set free, except his hands.

In the mean time Bleezer Googin had come back into the room, all cut and bleeding, and was loudly demanding the privilege of shooting Dick on the spot.

Some of his comrades were trying to urge him out of that, since it would be a good deal more fun to hang him, but Bleezer was hard to persuade, so as a last resort his weapons were taken from him.

Dick stepped forward boldly to the gambler queen, and in whisper said:

"I believe you planned this thing in order to speak to me. Am I not right in my guess?"

"You are," was the low, tremulous response.

"I am going to save you, if I can, but it may be impossible."

"I shall deem it a great favor if you can do that," answered Dick.

"Yes; I should think you would. Life is sweet, and no doubt you want to hang on as you can. You make your lips move, now, as though you are telling me considerable of a story, while I talk to you."

Dick took the hint and acted accordingly.

"I will post two or three men whom I can trust," the woman went on, in a rapid manner.

"They will clamor for a trial before you are hanged, and it is just barely possible they will lock you up to give you the trial to-morrow. If they do that I can probably save you."

"I understand."

"Well, I will do all I can, and that is all any one can do. I am not doing it without an object, as of course you must be aware."

"Can't you save my friend, too?" asked Dick.

"I can't promise anything for him," answered the woman. "It will all depend on how we are able to work. I will do the best I can."

"And no one can do better than that," Dick declared. "If you can only manage it so that I can get free and have the use of my hands, I can take care of myself and perhaps get my pard out of the trouble."

"I'll do the best I can. There, now, no more said, or they may suspect. Go, now," in loud tone, "and let them fit you with a hemp collar!"

"You are as cruel as you are beautiful," spoke Dick, also aloud. "But, I am not going to quarrel with you about that, if you will only deliver the message I have given into your keeping."

"I'll do the best I can, believe me," was the response.

"Have you any last word to say?" Dick asked, turning to Waterstone.

"No; not one," was the sharp reply. "If I swing I am going to die game. My folks will find out some time or other how I died."

By this time the room was in an uproar.

Some of the men had brought ropes, and they were put around the necks of the victims.

"Are you going to string us up without any trial?" demanded Dick.

"Ther case is dead against ye this time," answered the mayor. "What is ther use of a trial? You don't need no trial, 'cept a trial at stretchin' hemp."

"But, this is treating us too much like common horse-thieves," Dick complained. "We have done nothing to warrant it, and I for one object to it. Give us a fair chance to bring proof."

"Yer objections don't amount ter nothin'," was the coarse retort. "We has got all ther proof we wants now. We happen ter know enough about Deadwood Dick ter know that one or t'other of ye is ther man, an' we'll make sure by hangin' both."

"We have to admit that it is inconsiderate of us to try to spoil your fun again," said Waterstone, with grim humor, "but we are the ones with the most at stake. I propose another treat all around. You will get more satisfaction out of that, if you only look at it in the right light."

"No more foolin' about et," cried the mayor. "Bring lights, boyees, an' we'll soon settle ther bull business."

"It looks pretty dubious this time, eh?" said Waterstone to Dick.

"Yes; it certainly does," agreed Dick.

But, Richard Bristol had been in tight places too many times to give up in despair. While there was life there was hope.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN CRIMSON AND HER MEN.

BLEEZER GOOGIN, disarmed as said, was wildly urging the crowd to the lynching they proposed.

All cut and bleeding, a picture of distress generally, he had the sympathy of his admirers and the voice of a good many who feared him.

The crowd was all of one mind, seemingly, and the mayor was not slow to take advantage of the general feeling. Lights having been provided, he ordered the procession to form and start.

Out of the saloon poured the crowd, those with the lights leading the way and those with the prisoners, following close behind, while the mob poured after them in eager and excited haste. Little mercy might the prisoners expect here.

Catching step, the crowd headed for the tree under which Waterstone had come so near to ending his earthly career that afternoon, some of the leaders whistling a dismal death-march air. Just then it looked as though there would be a hanging, certainly.

Meantime, no sooner had they left the saloon than Nugget Nell dashed out by a rear door, and darted off in the darkness toward the tree.

Previously, she had spoken hurriedly to two or three men, ones whom, evidently, she could trust.

Under the tree was a box, as mentioned before, and when the crowd reached the spot, on that box stood Nugget Nell.

"Hillo!" cried the mayor, at sight of her, "what ar' you doin' byer, Nugget Nell?"

"I'm here because I have got a word to say about this thing," was the bold answer.

"What has yer got ter say? Let's hear et mighty quick."

"I have proof that one of these men is not Deadwood Dick," the girl assured.

"Proof! How have you got proof?"

"You all know Nugget Nell, don't you?"

"You bet!"

"And you know there is no fooli-hness about her, don't you?"

"Yas! Yas!"

"And if I chip in here you can rely on it that I know what I am doing, sure. As I said, I have proof."

"What is et? How did yer git et?"

"Let me wag my chin a little, and then I'll give you the whole plot."

"All right, gal; wag ahead! We knows Nugget Nell well enough ter know that she is true blue to Corduroy Crossin'; eh, boyees?"

And the boys, every one, shouted that they did.

"In the first place, then," the gambler queen began, "I hate to see two such noble fellows as these hanged without a fair chance for their side of the case. What if they are just our sort, and have a mind to take hold with us here as good and useful citizens?"

"We don't want ter trust strangers," objected the mayor.

"Sides," spoke up another fellow, "it is about time fer us ter expect another find of ther yaller, and we don't want strange eyes around then."

"That's what's the matter," the mayor added, shaking his head, and his two faces seemed to express strongly his objection to any such proceeding as the girl had proposed.

"Well, then, if you don't want to risk both of them, suppose you hold one of them prisoner and hang the other? And yet that would hardly be a fair deal. Still, I have the proof that one is not Deadwood Dick."

"What's yer proof? Ye have said that afore."

"My proof is in the message this man," pointing at Dick, "left with me. It did not strike me till you had started for the tree."

"What was ther message?"

"I will tell you. It was to his mother, whose name he gave me. He said: 'My mother's name is Susan Douglas, and she lives at Nesbit, Ohio. Tell her that I am dead, but do not tell her how I died. Send her my money, if the boys will let you.'"

Deadwood Dick was amazed. Here was a falsehood right out of the whole cloth.

What object had this stranger in lying to save his neck from the rope? He could not understand.

"Nugget Nell, ar' you tellin' us tber gospel truth?" the mayor cried.

"Did you ever know me to deal in any other kind of truth?" the girl demanded, with spirit.

"What do ye think on't boyees?" asked the mayor. "This hyer puts a new look onto ther case, I sh'u'd opine, don't et?"

Said one man:

"I am in favor of holdin' this feller over, anyhow, and seein' how he will pan. Thar's no danger that he will escape, and maybe we'll be able ter make use of him."

This was one of the men to whom the girl had spoken in the saloon.

"Yas; and so be I," cried another. Fer ther matter of that, et hits me that we might go a leetle slow, anyhow. Hyar we ar', a hull camp o' men, 'gainst these two, and et would be a howlin' pity ef we couldn't hold them prisoners."

And this speaker, too, was one to whom the girl had spoken. It was clear she had influence with them.

And there was yet another who voiced the same sentiment, while the crowd as a whole waited to see what the outcome was going to be.

"Let me chip in a word," spoke up Dick.

"Waal, let's hear from ye," invited the mayor.

"I don't ask any favor of you that you can't extend to Mr. Waterstone as well. He is a stranger to me, but during the few hours I have been in his company I have learned that he is a decent sort of fellow."

Nugget Nell frowned at this.

Just here Bleezer Googin let his bazoo be heard.

"Et ar' jest as I told ye," he cried. "Et's jest as I thort. These hyar two fellers is in cahoots, and one is bound ter stand up fer t'other. Mebby one ain't Deadwood Dick, but they ar' birds of a feather, and I'm fer seein' 'em both strung up jest as high as we kin h'ist 'em."

"That's ther talk!" immediately cried his followers.

Waterstone was next to make his voice heard.

"I don't want any favors at all," he declared. "If you are willing to let Mr. Douglas be held over, do it, and let me furnish amusement for you on this occasion. One dead man ought to satisfy you pretty well for one night's work, anyhow, boys."

This was said with all firmness and boldness.

"That's about an even way ter fix et up, I opine," observed the mayor, seeming anxious to please all parties concerned. "That's ther way I order et. Take this hyar feller and lock him up fer keepin', and lift this other one right up to ther limb. No more palaver about et."

"I object!" cried Dick. "Make it both or neither!"

"Make et both and be darn to Nugget Nell!" cried Bleezer Googin.

"You hold your tongue, Bleezer," ordered the spirited girl, as she took aim at him. "If you chip in again I'll drop you out of the race."

This, for the moment, silenced Mr. Googin.

It was plain enough that Nugget Nell had power over these rough rascals.

And turning immediately to Deadwood Dick, the gambler queen added, in a tone that meant business:

"And you, sir, if you have got any boss-sense in that good-looking head of yours, take the chance that's offered you. Nugget Nell has no more to say."

With that she sprung down from the box, and Carlo Waterstone was speedily put upon it, in the same dangerous fix he had been in once before. It looked now as though the end was at hand.

Deadwood Dick was hurried away a few yards by the men who had him in keeping, and the rope removed from his neck.

The other rope, that to which Waterstone was looped, was at the same time cast over a limb.

Just then was heard the thunder of horses' hoofs.

Everybody looked in the direction from which the sounds came, and several animals, with riders, were seen speeding toward the tree.

Before anything could be said or done they were at hand, and the leader, a masked woman in crimson, had the crowd covered with a pair of revolvers, and her voice rung out in command.

"Hands off that rope!" she ordered.

Immediately behind her were several horsemen, each wearing a crimson hat, and each with weapons to the fore.

The woman's order was obeyed promptly enough, for there was that in her tone which went to prove that it would be dangerous to disobey.

"Lieutenant," the woman ordered, immediately after, "dismount and release this man. If any one offers to hinder or molest you, that one will die in his tracks."

One of her men dismounted to obey the command, and did obey it, without delay and without hindrance.

He was back again in his saddle in a moment, and Carlo Waterstone was free.

To this time, a period of some seconds, no one had spoken. That is, no one in the crowd about the tree.

"Saay," the mayor suddenly blurted out, "who aire you, anyhow?"

"I am Captain Crimson," was the prompt response. "Bring that other prisoner of yours to the front here!"

One of her weapons was covering the mayor, and the other now took a threatening survey in the direction of the men who were holding Deadwood Dick.

It was not necessary for the captain to order, for these men brought Dick to the front at once, and let go of him. He was left still bound, however, but not for long.

The woman in crimson ordered the mayor himself to release him, and the mayor did not hesitate about obeying.

The fact of the business was, the mayor and all his men were too surprised to do anything else than obey. Whence had come these mysterious horsemen? What meant their presence?

"Now," said the woman in crimson, further, "restore their weapons to these men at once, or it will be the worse for all of you. Don't delay, if you set any value on your lives, for if I order my men to fire they will shoot to kill."

"What business hev you ter come hyar and interfere with what don't consarn ye, is what I want ter know?" cried the mayor.

"Ask no questions, but do as you are ordered, and be quick, too," was the further command.

The weapons were handed over, and Deadwood Dick and Carlo Waterstone were, once more free and armed, though still in the midst of a howling mob hungry for their lives.

CHAPTER IX.

DEADWOOD DICK RECOGNIZED.

DEADWOOD DICK was puzzled.

Events had crowded upon events since his coming to the camp.

Who was this woman in crimson? What her interest in him and the man who had come so near to hanging?

If he was puzzled, no less so was everybody else in the crowd. Nugget Nell, who had turned back when the horsemen rode up, looked the surprise she felt.

"There!" said the woman in crimson, when her orders had been carried out to the full, "now my business with you is done for the present, men of Corduroy Crossing. It is well that you have obeyed me."

"But who in blazes are ye?" demanded the mayor. "What right have ye to chip in hyar where nothin' consarns ye? It will be healthy fer ye to git out of hyar; that is what I tell ye as a gentle hint. You had better git right up and git. You ar' not wanted hyar."

"It makes little difference whether I am wanted or not," was the retort. "I come and go as I please. Now, I am going to take your prisoners from you, citizens, and the less kicking there is about it, the better for you. It will mean death for the man who interferes, you may depend on it."

"And what do you intend doing with us?" queried Dick.

"We may be going from bad to worse, in accompanying you," declared Waterstone.

"You can fare no worse than you would have fared here, but for the arrival of myself and my men," was the woman's response.

"A word with you, masked woman," spoke up Nugget Nell, advancing fearlessly.

"We'll hear you" was the response.

"It is to you alone; I have nothing to say to your men."

"No matter, it is all the same. Speak out, or not at all."

"What are these prisoners to you?"

"I found them in trouble and have helped them out. Isn't that sufficient answer? I might ask what they are to you?"

"And I must answer the same. You say you are going to take them with you. I demand the right to object to that regarding one of them."

"Do you, indeed! May I inquire which one?"

"This one," indicating Dick.

"Well, you cannot have either. I know their lives are in danger here, and so shall take the men with me."

"Have we no voice in that matter ourselves?" asked Dick.

"I should think you would be only too glad to get away," was the crimson woman's response.

"Not so. My life has been spared, here, and I am going to remain. I do not believe these citizens will try further violence with me."

"You do not know them. You are risking your head in the lion's mouth by remaining here another hour."

"But, I do not know you."

"Is it not enough that I tell you we are your friends?"

"That is not so," Dick declared. "I have no friends within miles of this section of country."

"You mistake, sir. Captain Crimson and her men are your friends—the friends of any worthy person whom they may find in trouble as they found you."

"Well, I will take your word for it, then. Still, you do not know that I am a worthy person. Not to impose upon you, I want to tell you just what I am. I am a gambler, and perhaps worse."

"Nevertheless, you are a man in danger here, and I am offering to get you safely away."

"On the other hand," spoke up Nugget Nell, "I think I am able to promise him safety if he remains. What do you say, mayor?"

"Et hits me hard that ther galscot hev showed his true colors all along," was the mayor's comment.

"And you'll promise him his life if he desires to stay here?"

"Yas; I promise him his life, darn et."

It was, to say the least, a strange complication of matters.

Dick was thoughtful for a few seconds. He was trying to decide what to do in the case.

He had come to the camp with a fixed purpose in view. To go away would be to leave that purpose unaccomplished. He was free and armed again, and had faced worse dangers, he believed, than what threatened him here.

"What about you?" he asked, turning to Waterstone.

"I am going to take my chances by going away with this woman and her men," was the reply.

"Which shows your good sense," the woman in crimson observed.

"Perhaps," the man added. "How came you to arrive here at so opportune a moment?" he demanded.

"Only by mere chance," was the reply.

"Then what brought ye here, anyhow?" the mayor wished to know.

"Curiosity, sir," was the answer to that. "We followed the trail, and it led us here."

"Waal, et's a darn good ways from nowhere to be led by chance, that's all I have got ter say," the mayor commented.

By this time the shock of surprise the coming of the horsemen had occasioned, was beginning to wear off, and the crowd was pressing forward with familiar curiosity.

"Keep your distance, men!" the woman in crimson suddenly ordered. "You are quite near enough as it is. For the last time, stranger," to Dick, "will you accompany us?"

"To tell you the truth," answered Dick, "I feel a good deal safer here than I should feel with you. The citizens here are beginning to know me for what I am, and I prefer to remain. Thanking you for your favor, nevertheless."

"You have the promise of Nugget Nell that he shall not be harmed," the gambler queen spoke up.

The woman in crimson favored the gambler queen with a hard stare; then she suddenly drew her horse around and was ready to go.

"Mount, you, behind one of my men," she ordered Waterstone. "And you," to Nugget Nell, "see to it that your word is kept. If you fail, your death will follow."

Lifting her hand, then, she dashed away, and her men after her at full gallop, all soon to be swallowed up by the darkness.

"By the 'arnel goshness, ef I ain't jiggered!" exclaimed the mayor.

"Can't yer see through et?" cried Bleezer Googin. "They is all in cahoots, that's what's ther matter, and they're all pizer death on this hyar camp, or I'm a liar, and you hear me."

"And another lot of ther yaller expected at a'most any time, too," put in the fellow who had spoken about that thing before.

Deadwood Dick wondered what was meant by that odd expression.

He meant to know, if life was spared him. He

had come to this wild camp with the intention of playing a lone hand, and it looked now as though he would have to play that way or not at all, since his chance ally had deserted him.

He congratulated himself again and again, in mind, upon the fact of his having left his wife behind on setting out upon this campaign. A worse hole than Dixon's Deposit, was this, and there he had vowed that he never would take her into another such place.

Brave, bonny Kate had objected, of course, but, Dick's mind made up, nothing could turn him, and so he was able to think of her as safely lodged in a hotel in a civilized town during his absence.

"I don't believe anything of the kind," cried Nugget Nell, in retort to what Bleezer Googin had said. "If that were so, this man would have gone with them, that is plain. It is possible that the other fellow and the woman in crimson were known to each other."

"Anyhow, I know what I'm goin' ter do," spoke the mayor.

"And what's that?" asked Nell.

"I'm goin' ter put down ther bars, and blockade ther camp. Nary a galoot is goin' out or comin' in till after ther next yaller cloud has passed. Thar's too much at stake."

Again mention of the "yellow" something. What did it mean? Dick was puzzled for an explanation.

Naturally, his mind reverted to gold, since that was often spoken of in that way.

"A good idea," said the gambler queen. "Do you hear that, Mr. Douglas? You are to be a prisoner here for some days at least."

"I care nothing for that, so long as I have the freedom of the camp," was the return. "As I told you at first, I consider myself better off here than anywhere else, just now."

"Yas; but yer hasn't told us why."

"I beg your pardon, but I think I have explained."

"Jest do et again, then, ef yer please."

"I find that you are all against Deadwood Dick, for some reason or other, and I do not care to fall in with that gentleman."

"That don't go down," cried Bleezer Googin.

"And why not?"

"Cause, from what we hev seen of ye, Deadwood Dick wouldn't have no show in your hands, unless he's more'n human."

"That's jest what I can't get out of my crop," declared the mayor. "Et was simply amazin', ther way you did boost Bleezer hyar. Et war amazin', and that's what I'm shoutin'."

"And ther more so, when he allowed me to knock him about like he did at ther fust," Bleezer reminded.

"You ought to have had sense enough to leave him alone," said Nugget Nell.

"We ain't talkin' about that, not er tall," cried Bleezer. "Et's ther facts of ther case we're considerin'."

"All simple enough, perhaps," said Dick, speaking up. "I am rather strong, I admit, but strong men are not always well posted in the fistic art. I had no desire to tackle you."

Hoofs were heard again, this time made by one horse alone.

The sound came from the direction in which the crimson woman and her men had disappeared.

Every eye was turned in the direction of the sound, every eye except the mayor's rear pair, and in a few seconds a horseman loomed up.

A few strides more by his panting horse, and he drew rein under the tree in the circle of light made by the torches, and the moment he stopped his eyes seemed to fix upon Dick.

"Deadwood Dick, by all that's great!" he cried.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISING CONFESSION.

DEADWOOD DICK glared at the new-comer. It was a personage he had seen somewhere, some time.

He was recognized, beyond a doubt, now, and his plans foiled.

Just when events were playing into his hands nicely, this was rough.

In an instant the crowd was in a wild uproar, and Bleezer Googin was the wildest of them all.

But, to keep events in order.

The new-comer had been the first to speak, for his keen look at Deadwood Dick had foretold that he recognized the man.

It was only a point of time, however, that the silence was maintained.

"Tiger Bill!" exclaimed the mayor and others.

Deadwood Dick knew him now. A merci-

less rascal who had once evaded his grip, and who was "wanted."

"Yas, Tiger Bill, you bet!" the fellow acknowledged.

"What did I tell yer?" cried Bleezer Googin. "Didn't I say it was Deadwood Dick? Whoop! Now we has got him, and now fer a hangin'!"

And then it was his followers whooped it up for all they were worth, to put it in that homely way, and that the crowd fairly let itself loose. Dick was in danger again.

Leaping upon the box, Dick brought his revolvers into play, and shouted:

"Keep your shirts on, gentlemen; don't get crazy! I am not going to fly away. What proof does this man offer for what he charges?"

"What proof!" cried Bleezer. "He don't need no proof, he don't; we all know Tiger Bill, I reckon."

"That's the fact," approved the mayor. "Deadwood Dick, the jig is up."

"You bet your life it's up!" cried the new-comer. "I know ye, Dickey, and you know me, too. I've got ye in a trap this time, and if ye git out it won't be any fault o' mine."

"Hang him! Hang him right here and now!" shouted Bleezer.

"That's ther talk!" echoed the crowd. "We don't want no blamed detectives around hyar!"

"And jest now least of all," Tiger Bill put in. "Thar's a yaller cloud comin' this way, and it'll be hyar before midnight, or orter be."

Again mention of that mysterious—What?

"Hang him!" cried the crowd.

"Yank him!"

"String him right up!"

Nugget Nell sprung upon the box beside Dick. She, too, had a brace of fivers in her shapely hands, and her expression of face was grim and determined.

"Go a little slow with this funeral!" she ordered, coolly. "You have got to keep your word, men of Corduroy, or Nugget Nell throws up the sponge and drops out of your game."

"But, durn et, gal, we has ther proof, now!" urged Bleezer.

"And ye know what Deadwood Dick's presence hyar means, don't ye?" demanded the mayor.

"It will probably mean death to the first man who attempts to lay a hand on him, the way he is armed and ready for business," the girl reminded.

"And do you mean ter stand up fer him, Nugget Nell?" cried Tiger Bill.

"I intend to be as good as my word," was the curt response.

"And what was yer word, then?"

"I have promised him that his life shall be spared, and so has the mayor, and we are going to stick to it."

"You're a fool, and the mayor is another! Double-face, is this your say-so, too? Are ye sech a fool as ter let a man like Deadwood Dick git out of yer hands when ye hev got him?"

"No, et ain't my say-so at all!" avowed the mayor. "When I promised Nell that he shouldn't be harmed, I had made up my mind that he couldn't be Deadwood Dick; but now we have got it straight from you that he is."

"And will ye let him break up our game here? I tell ye ther yaller is comin' right soon, and he must be put out of ther way afore ther cloud gits hyar."

"Nell, ye see how et ar'," the mayor urged.

"I can see just how it is," was the response. "I have given this man my word that he shall not be hanged to-night, and I'm going to stick to it. If this camp can't hold him prisoner for one night, you had better close shop and go out of business, that is all about that."

"Besides," remarked Dick, "before you can do any hanging, there will be a terrible ruction here, and just about ten good men will bite the dust. Here are ten pills, and each one is good for a life. Think twice before you act. Besides, there may be danger from other quarters."

"What do ye mean by that?"

"Well, you hold that I am Deadwood Dick. Suppose I am; can you imagine that Deadwood Dick would come here to play a lone hand against a whole camp? Wouldn't it be more reasonable to suppose that he would come with plenty of backing?"

"Just chew on that for a second, and make up your minds," added Nell. "I am either with you or against you, just as you will have it."

"D'ye hear that?" cried Bleezer Googin. "He 'mits that he is Deadwood Dick now, an' he openly defies us. Ar' we goin' ter stand that? Wull, I should surrender my gall ef I think so!"

"But, et ain't only ther galoot now," reminded the mayor; "hyar's Nugget Nell backin' him. Say, Nell, what has come over ye? Don't ye know that ther safety of this camp 'pends on ther death of Deadwood Dick?"

"Don't it look rather as though the safety of a good many of you depends on his life?" Nell demanded.

"But, why ar' you backin' him, that's what I want ter know."

"And you do know, Double-face; because I have given my word, and Nugget Nell's word is her bond, every time."

"Wull, what's ther odds?" cried Tiger Bill. "Hyar's yer hull camp ter keep him prisoner, and et would be a howlin' pity ef you couldn't hold onto one man, even ef et is Deadwood Dick. Lock him up, and so save a fuss."

"I think I'll have something to say about that myself," spoke up Dick. "I don't propose to be either hanged or locked up. What are you going to do about it?"

"D'ye hear that?" cried Bleezer. "D'ye hear what he's sayin' to us?"

"Perhaps you would like to take him in hand and teach him a lesson," suggested Nugget Nell.

"Not any, ef yer please, Miss Nelly."

"Then don't be shooting off your mouth so much. I'll propose something to you, boys."

"Wull, what ar' et?" inquired the puzzled mayor.

"You know what we have promised the man, that he shall not be hanged."

"Yes."

"Well, there's nothing against our holding him prisoner in the camp. You can put a guard so strong that he can't get away, and let him have the freedom of the island."

"You may safely do that, gentlemen," said Dick, in his quiet way. "I assure you that I have no intencion of going away. What is more, you may appoint a committee of ten or a dozen to watch me. If I am Deadwood Dick, as this fellow has declared, you will have me here just as safely as though you were to lock me up."

"Ef ye ar' Deadwood Dick!" cried Tiger Bill. "Thar's no ef about et; et's a dead sure thing. I know ye, me noble Richard. Ef ye git away from hyar et won't be no fault o' mine."

"What do ye say, boyees?" asked the mayor. "Ef et wasn't fer Nell, we know what we'd do, mighty quick; but as et ar'—"

"Does ther gal forget that ther yaller is comin'?" cried Tiger Bill.

"I forget nothing," said the gambler queen. "Before we let him go we can nabe him swear not to reveal what he knows. Deadwood Dick is not the man to break a pledge, if what we have heard of him is true."

"All right," the new-comer agreed, "I'm satisfied with et that way ef ther mayor is. We'll take keer that he don't git away with no secrets, anyhow; leastways I will meself."

With that he turned his horse in the direction of the Howler Saloon and went off.

This act on his part decided the matter, and weapons were put away and the crowd began to disperse.

"This hyar settles et fer ther time bein'," said the mayor. "I'm goin' ter keep an eye on you, though, stranger, and you don't want ter try no trick."

"That's what I would call a clean bluff," cried Nugget Nell, as she sprung lightly down from the box. "Come on to the Howler, pard, and I'll see to it that this crowd don't harm you."

"Much obliged for your interest and help," acknowledged Dick, "but I would have made a lively circus for them, even if you hadn't backed me. Well, now it seems settled that I am Deadwood Dick. All right; since they have forced the title upon me I will play in that role."

"Then you do admit it?"

"Have you any doubt about it, after that fellow recognized me?"

"Well, no; but then it's something further to hear it from your own lips. Do you mean it?"

"I mean it in the way I indicated. It is forced upon me; I accept it, and will strive to do justice to Deadwood Dick's reputation, that's all. You hear what I say, men of Corduroy."

The crowd was moving off, but enough had heard his words to spread it around that the man admitted his identity.

Dick walked toward the saloon in company with the queen.

"Do you know what I have risked in be-friending you to the last?" the young woman asked, in low tones.

"Considerable, I can well imagine," was Dick's answer.

"Everything," was the assurance. "Even my life. If you get away from here, and barm comes to the camp, it will be all up with Nugget Nell."

"Then you were foolish to risk so much, that's all," asserted Dick.

"It is said that woman is foolish in a good many things," was Nell's rejoinder.

"Why did you do it?" Dick inquired. "I am nothing to you."

"I am going to tell you why I did it, if you will tell me candidly one thing."

"What is that?"

"Are you, truly, Deadwood Dick?"

"Well, yes, I am! Tiger Bill spoke the truth."

"Then listen to my confession: I have often heard of you, and you have been my hero for many a day. Call me foolish if you will, Dick, but I love you, and would like to join my fate to yours. What do you say?"

CHAPTER XI.

RICHARD IN LIMBO.

DEADWOOD DICK was amazed.

Here was something that was more than a surprise.

He said nothing at first, but gave vent to his feelings in a low whistle.

"I have surprised you?" the girl asked.

"Well, rather," was Dick's admission. "You can't mean it."

"But I do mean it, though. I am just what you see me, and you have seen that I have some nerve."

"I should say you have. But, I know nothing about you, and you know nothing about me save what you have heard at second-hand. This is rather sudden."

"Yes, I admit all that, and you will say that it is wrong for me to act as I have in the matter. Very well, I can stand that. A woman ought to have the same right as a man to make love."

"There is something in that, certainly. As it is now, woman has to take a back seat in such matters, and her choice cannot be expressed. She is the creature of chance, as it were, or a prize waiting patiently to be drawn by somebody."

"That's it, exactly. Well, no more now: Here we are at the Howler. You are putting up at the Bang-up, are you not?"

"Yes."

"So am I. I will manage to see you there after I close my game."

"All right, if I am alive by that time. I expect nothing else than a grand ruction here."

"I don't think so. They know that I am for you, and they have a wholesome respect for Nugget Nell, even if I am little."

They entered the Howler together, and Nell proceeded at once to her room.

Dick paused for a few minutes in the saloon proper, where he braved the hard looks and scowls of the crowd.

Finally he went on into the gambler queen's domain, where Nugget Nell was now seated at her table, ready to resume the business that had been interrupted.

Dick's entrance brought in the crowd.

"Well, sir, you have said you came here for the purpose of skinning the camp," the young woman reminded.

"Is that an invitation to begin right here?" asked Dick.

"You may take it that way if you want to; you see I am idle."

"What is your limit?"

"One thousand dollars, for the balance of this evening."

"That is rather light."

"You may find it heavy enough, before you are done."

"Well, I'll risk it, anyhow."

Dick made a purchase of chips, and the game commenced.

There was a crowd around the table, and no one else offered to play, wanting to see how this test of skill would turn.

Little need to describe the playing at length. Dick lost at every turn, no matter how well he calculated the chances in his favor on different plays, and was unable to detect anything like cheating.

At the end of an hour he arose from the table minus his thousand dollars.

"Well, what do you think about it now?" asked Nugget Nell, smiling.

"I think you are the most expert hand with the pasteboards I ever saw," Dick answered.

"You did not detect any cheating, did you?"

"Not a bit."

"And you played your best."

"Yes, I certainly did. You are best man, so to say."

"Very well, take it as a reminder of what you may expect if you play further. You stand no chance with Nugget Nell."

"I believe you, though I do not understand how it is. Anyhow, I have had enough for to-night, and I'll go over to the hotel and enjoy a smoke and then to bed."

"Don't forget."

"I won't."

This last, as Dick well knew, referred to something else.

It was to remind him of what the girl had said about seeing him at the hotel after she closed her game.

Making sure that his weapons were in position for instant use, Dick passed out into the saloon proper, where he loitered for a few minutes.

In an idle way he took note of who was present and who was not, so far as his memory of faces would serve him, and he was speedily made aware that Bleezer Googin, Tiger Bill, and some others, were not there.

Richard exchanged some civil words with one or two men, including the proprietor, and went out into the night.

It was dark, and many of the lights were now out.

He knew the way well enough, however, for it did not take Dick long to get the locations in a new place.

Stepping out boldly in the direction of the Bang-up Hotel, he got away from the vicinity of the Howler as soon as he could, keeping a wary eye for danger.

He saw no one, as he advanced, and had covered half the distance to the hotel before anything happened. Something did happen, then, and in a way so unexpected that he was taken altogether at a disadvantage.

The first alarm he had was when he heard a "swish" right at his feet, and then it was too late for him to profit by it, for something struck his feet with great force and he was sent forward upon his face on the ground.

So heavily was he thrown, too, that for a second he was dazed, and before he could recover, several men pounced upon him and he was quickly gagged and bound.

Not a word had been spoken, and as soon as they had made him secure his captors picked him up and bore him away.

By this time Dick had recovered from the shock, but it was now too late, and he was a prisoner in the hands of his worst foes. He could not see them to recognize them, but had no doubt that Bleezer Googin and Tiger Bill were in the party.

He was taken off at right angles from the trail that led around to the hotel by the lake, and carried off into the woods.

Just how far he was taken, he could not tell, but judged it to be about half a mile.

When the men stopped they laid him on the ground, and one made a light.

The light revealed Googin and Tiger Bill as the leaders.

"Waal, hyar ye be," observed Bleezer, with a grin.

"Yas, and hyar ye will stay, fer some time, I'm thinkin'," added Tiger.

"Et's a pity not ter hang him right up ter onest," declared one man. "Et's ther safest."

"You ar' right," agreed Tiger Bill. "With ther yaller expected at any hour, we don't want no outside eyes and ears around hyar."

"Nobody is more fer hangin' him than I am," cried Googin. "Say ther word, old man, and we'll yank him right up jest as high as ever he will go, I'm tellin' ye: What yer say?"

Said one man:

"I can't 'gree to et, pards, fer Nugget Nell would be after us like grim death hot-shod."

"That's the fact," another supported. "Better stick to ther fu'st plan, an' let 'em take chances afterwards. That's ther safest."

"And," put in another, "ef et comes to ther pinch, darn me ef I wouldn't ruther have Deadwood Dick, after me than Nugget Nell. A woman is a scorcher when she gits after a feller's blood."

To settle it, it was put to vote then and there, and one in the majority gave Dick the benefit of imprisonment.

By the light of the torch he was able to take in the surroundings.

He was in a sort of gully, deep in the woods, and at the right was what had the appearance of being a cavern.

Such it was, in fact, and after the vote he was picked up again and carried into it and taken to the rear, where he was laid down on the hard floor.

The cavern was a small one, not more than

thirty feet deep, but it answered the purpose on this occasion.

"Thar!" exclaimed Tiger Bill, savagely, "I guess ye wull keep hyar till you ar' needed."

"Yer kin bet on't," added Bleezer. "And when yer is wanted, my opine is that et wull be to 'tend yer own hangin'. We'll talk Nell into et by that time."

Dick could not make response, of course, being gagged, and after some further taunts the rascals went off and left him there alone with his thoughts. And they were not of a cheering nature.

"If I could only have been free, with my weapons in hand," he said to himself, "I would have made a place of mourning of this cavern, if these fellows have any one to mourn for them at all. But, they have got the bulge on me, and bad. I guess my lone hand game is all up."

His thoughts went over the whole ground, and there was one thing that puzzled him greatly.

That was, concerning what could be meant by the mention of "yellow" that had been made so many times.

What could it be that was expected? Of what nature, that it must be kept so secret? What, besides gold, was commonly called "yellow?"

Dick was, as said, puzzled.

Just here it may not be out of place to state what business had brought him to this border town of Corduroy Crossing.

First, however, a word about the place itself. It was near the Canada line, and the lake, the northern end of it, laved the shore of the Dominion.

The Line was only a few miles distant from the camp, and it had been suspected for some time that smuggling was going on by way of this lake and the camp that occupied the island.

One reason, it was known that the mines at Corduroy Crossing had long since played out, so that the camp could no longer draw its support from them. Then, too, it had no other visible means of support. These facts had been noticed by the Government men.

Finally, Deadwood Dick, he being selected as the most expert and daring of all the Western detectives, had been requested to go to the place, get at the secrets it might hold, and proceed according to his own judgment against the denizens of the hard hole, calling for help if needed. Anyhow, to report.

As stated further back, he had not allowed his wife to accompany him on this trip.

Knowing the place by repute, he considered it altogether unfit for her, and so had left her at a hotel in a little city miles away.

It looked now as though his mission was going to prove a failure. He believed that smuggled goods would pass through the camp that night, and here he was, a helpless prisoner.

"Little wonder that he felt sour and disgusted."

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN CRIMSON AGAIN.

LEAVING Dick for a moment, let us learn what became of Carlo Waterstone.

Mounted behind one of Captain Crimson's men, he was taken rapidly out of one danger, but he could not be sure that he was not going straight into another.

He knew not who this woman in crimson was, and her men were certainly equal to overcoming him. That, however, did not trouble him, for it had been certain death to remain at the camp.

Captain Crimson led the way up the trail and over the corduroy road to the woods on the north side.

Once over the bridge, she touched her horse and went forward at a lively pace, and paused not until something more than half a mile had been covered.

Finally she called a halt, and when all had stopped, ordered one of her men to produce a light, which was quickly done. There were seven of the men, the woman and the prisoner making nine all told.

Taking the pocket torch from the hand of the man who had lighted it, the woman in crimson rode up to Waterstone and looked searchingly at his face.

"You will admit that I have saved your life, I suppose," she observed, when evidently satisfied with her scrutiny.

"I admit it willingly," was the prompt response, "and must thank you for it."

"No thanks are necessary. Are you willing to prove that you are in some measure thankful?"

"Why, certainly, madam. If there is any way in which I can repay the favor, you have only to command me. Try me and see."

"Before I do so I must know who and what you are."

"That is asking a good deal, when I do not know you."

"You ought to know me to be a friend, at least."

"Such I believe you are, but perhaps your regard might change were you to know just who and what I am."

"It is quite possible; but I give you my promise not to harm you, no matter in what regard I may be led to hold you when I know all."

"Suppose you learn that I am an outlaw, red-handed and merciless."

"That I cannot believe."

"You do not answer."

"Well, even in that case I promise you your freedom if you will help me in a certain work I have to do."

"That is fair enough, certainly. But, on the other hand, what if I prove to be a detective, and perhaps your worst enemy, if you are not honest?"

"I only wish you were a detective, that is to say—a Government detective, for then I could depend on you."

"What is the business you have for me to do, if I may ask?"

"I want you to assist me in rescuing Deadwood Dick from the hands of the bad men of the camp we just left."

"Ha! Perhaps you want to get hold of him to hang him?"

"Not so; but to save his life, which I know is in danger there. Will you aid me?"

"One question first: Are you sure that man is Deadwood Dick?"

"I am. There is no doubt about that. Why do you ask?"

"Perhaps I am more a foe than friend to him."

"If I thought that, you would not escape us to do him harm."

"Then you do not believe it."

"I do not."

"One question more."

"Ask it, sir."

"If the man is Deadwood Dick, he has come here with a purpose. Are you willing to lend him the aid of yourself and men in carrying out that purpose?"

"I am. To tell you the truth, that is what has brought us here."

"Well, I can believe you. Anyhow, I am going to trust my secret to you. I am a detective, and my business here, or at the camp, was to learn what I could and report to my superiors."

"Your name is—"

"My name here is Carlo Waterstone."

"I am asking you for your true name, sir."

"Well, having told you so much I see no harm in telling you more. A fellow may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, I suppose. My true name is Ben West."

"I have heard of you. Now I believe you are telling me the truth. It is your duty to rescue Deadwood Dick from his enemies if you can. Why did you desert him and leave him there?"

"Now, Lady Crimson, that is rather rough," the man asserted. "Did you not force me to accompany you? But, that was my plan, anyhow, when the chance offered. To remain there meant death. Escaping, I meant to go back at once, in disguise, and so be ready to help Dick. He stood by me like a man and I shall do all I can to serve him."

"Good. We now understand each other. I want you to go back there with me, this very night, and see that Dick comes to no harm."

"I am willing, if you can disguise yourself."

"Have no doubt about that, for I can do it. I have asked this of you, because you ought to know the camp better than I or my men."

"Perhaps I do; but, what of your men while we are there?"

"I had thought to leave them on this side, within calling distance."

"Too far away. They must be on the island. If wanted, they will be wanted in a hurry."

"Have you a plan, then?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"Have the men swim their horses to the island, landing behind the bluff on the other side of the hotel, and there remain."

"But, will they not be in danger there?"

"Undoubtedly; but not in so much danger as you will be there without them to back you."

"Perhaps you are right. Lieutenant, what do you think about it?"

"This to one of the men."

"It is all right," was the response. "You have only to order us, lady, and we obey."

"Have you nothing else to offer? No suggestion to make?"

"I would suggest that you do not go into danger at the island at all, but let me and my men do the work for you."

"It is useless to suggest that. I must be where danger is."

"So I knew you would say. I have nothing to offer further, then, but you may depend on us when you need us."

All the men echoed this promise.

"Very well; that will be the plan, then," Captain Crimson declared.

"Now, Mr. West," the woman added, turning to him, "what manner of disguise are you able to assume?"

"I will dismount and show you in a few moments," was the response; and with his words the man slipped down from the horse he was on.

"You will allow me to step out of sight for a moment?" he asked.

"One of my men will accompany you," was the response.

"Very well; I have no objection."

He walked a little distance up the trail, one of the horsemen with him, and was gone perhaps five minutes.

When he returned, the transformation in his appearance was wonderful. He was a rough-looking miner, with red shirt and slouch hat, and with hair and beard of a rusty red.

The woman looked at him in surprise.

"Are you the same man?" she asked.

"No, marni," was the response. "I'm now Ben West, a miner, sort o' prospectin' 'round in these hyar diggin's."

The disguise was complete, and by it the man proved his claim to being a detective.

He looked larger than he had before, but that was owing to the fact that he had the shirt on over his other clothes.

Captain Crimson laughed.

"You are a good one," she declared. "Remain here for a minute and I will show you what I can do."

Going up the trail a little distance, the woman dismounted, and when she came back, leading her horse, she was hardly to be recognized.

In fact, she could not be recognized as the same person. She wore rough, common clothes, and looked a worthy life-partner to the detective now in the garb of a rough miner.

"I selected this from among three or four disguises I have rolled up in my blanket," she said, "thinking it the most fitting one to go with yours. I can go into the camp with you as your wife, if you think that will do."

"I have no doubt about it. But, are we to go now, or wait till morning?"

"We will go as soon as possible. Great danger may threaten Deadwood Dick even now."

"Very well; be it as you say."

The woman now had no mask on, but a coarse wig, and a horribly dirty and badly wrinkled face hid her identity completely.

She looked a toothless hag, almost, but her form gave the lie to that, to the close observer. The detective knew that she was not what she appeared.

A consultation followed, in which all the men were allowed to express opinions and offer suggestions, and finally everything was arranged as far as could be, and they set out upon the back trail.

At the beginning of the corduroy road they parted company, the lieutenant taking the men and horses around to the shore of the lake, where he was to enter the water with them and swim to the island at the point to which the detective had directed him; while the woman and the detective went across the corduroy on foot.

The night was dark, as it has been described already.

When they reached the island, they walked silently and carefully, and stepped upon the ground without attracting the attention of the guard.

Proceeding along the edge of the marsh, they soon came to the lake, and continuing on, passed the hotel and proceeded on around to the point where the horsemen were expected.

In due time the lieutenant and men, with every horse, emerged from the water and entered under the sheltered nook at the foot of the bluff.

Here, final plans were laid, and the old miner and his pretending wife made their way to the hotel.

What would be the outcome of their strange undertaking remained to be seen.

Their first business was to find Deadwood Dick.

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK IN THE CRUCIBLE.

To Deadwood Dick the time passed slowly enough.

It seemed that his mission to the island camp had been a dead failure. There was little prospect that he would be able to accomplish anything.

Still, he had come there to play a lone hand, and Dick was a fellow who generally carried out what he undertook, if it was possible to do so; and he had a way of overcoming seeming impossibilities.

The fix he was in now, however, was one that he could not get out of without some outside help. Tiger Bill and Bleezer Googin had made a good job of securing him, and try as he would he could not loosen his bonds to any degree. And to look for help was like hoping against hope.

But, was it so hopeless?

He remembered Nugget Nell and the strange confession she had made to him.

Not finding him at the hotel, would she not be likely to hunt for him? And if she knew the island well, as she must, would she not find him?

There was certainly something in this to give him hope, for his foes could not know of the confession the girl had made, and would not think of watching her very closely.

Dick was not far away from the truth in his calculations.

A considerable time had passed, when he imagined he heard some one moving at the entrance to the cavern.

He listened attentively. Yes, sure enough, he was not mistaken. Was it friend or foe? He waited for some demonstration from the intruder.

It came.

"Dick?"

So a woman's voice spoke, in cautious tone.

Dick gave a start. The voice was not unlike that of his wife, brave Kodak Kate's, he thought.

Could it be that it was she? No; impossible! It must be Nugget Nell, and it was certain enough that she was not Kate.

"Dick?"

So the voice called again, the person having advanced into the cavern a little distance.

Being gagged, Dick could only utter a groan in response.

"Dick, is it you?" the woman asked.

Dick responded with a sound that was as near a "Yes" as he could utter.

In a moment more the person was at his side, her hands caressed his head, and she whispered: "I am so glad I have found you. It was a rascally trick they played you, but I will make them sorry for it, you bet. I'll strike a light."

She had brought a piece of candle with her, in her pocket, and lighting that she was able to see and be seen by the man she had come to rescue. It was Nugget Nell, as Dick had guessed.

"They left you gagged, did they?" she cried. "I was sure of it, the way you answered me. I'll soon relieve you of that fix."

Finding a place where she could stand the candle, she quickly removed the gag and gave Dick the liberty of speech, so to say.

"You have done me a great favor, Nell," Dick hastened to say. "But, do not stop at this, but free me altogether."

"I am going to do that," was the response, "but only on condition."

"Ha! then you are not so much my friend as I had hoped."

"I am more your friend than any one else in the world, Deadwood Dick."

"Now is your time to prove it," Dick reminded.

"Have you so soon forgotten what I told you?"

"No; and am not likely to forget it."

"I must have your answer before I release you."

"You must not forget that you are a stranger to me."

"I do not overlook that. I am willing to tell you all about myself, and then receive your decision."

"And what if I cannot comply with your request?"

"I only hope it will not be that, Dick. That will mean death for me—death for both of us."

Dick felt that he was in a delicate dilemma here.

He did not know what to think of this Nugget Nell; it looked as though she must be a trifle unbalanced in mind.

She had declared that she loved him, had proposed that they join hands in the work he was

doing—that was, he understood her, that he make her his wife.

That was simply impossible. He could not do anything of that sort, nor could he promise anything of the kind. And yet his life, it seemed, hung in the balance. He knew not what to do for the best.

"You will agree," he remarked, "that I ought to know all about you before I come to any agreement with you. Also that I must understand fully just what you mean. Do not hesitate about speaking right out plainly, since you seem so much in earnest."

"That is what I mean to do—speak plainly. I have told you that I have long admired you as my hero, for your name has long been known to me. And now having met you I love you fondly and dearly. I am taking the right to speak my mind boldly. Will you make me your wife?"

"That is asking a good deal, Nugget Nell."

"I know it is, but I am willing to give you my love and life."

"How do you know that I am worthy of so much, every other consideration aside in the matter?"

"Because you are Deadwood Dick."

"You seem to think that is everything to be considered."

"It is enough for me. I ask nothing, only that you will let me be with you, your slave if you will."

"The wife of Deadwood Dick could be nothing but his equal, Nugget Nell. You had better take more time to consider about this. Wait till you know me better."

"I know you well enough. I must have your answer this hour, or it will be too late forever. Can you not see and believe that I am true and earnest in what I propose? But, you would know more about me."

"I must know all about you."

"I will tell you, holding nothing back. I will lay the truth before you, and then await your decision."

"Go ahead. I do not pledge myself to anything, however, so if you have anything to withhold, do not speak it."

"Would I keep anything back, after the great request I have made? Could I hold anything untold? Would it be right to do so?"

"You are the best judge of that, perhaps."

"Yes; I am the best judge of that. My name is Nellie Fenton, and I was born and reared at a village in Washington. Of my early life there is nothing to tell. I am of good family, and my parents are respected people. At the age of seventeen I loved—loved too well, and have suffered the penalty. But I have had my revenge, for I hunted down my destroyer and killed him in a duel. Before that time, and since that time, no reproach can be laid against me. You have heard all."

For a moment Dick was silent.

This woman's story, so evidently true, touched him.

"Nugget Nell," he presently spoke, "your sad story reminds me of what One has said,—something about the man without guilt throwing the first stone. It is not for me to condemn you. I am sorry for you, and were I free to love and wed, your story should be nothing in the way, provided it is true in every particular."

"And true it is, I swear it."

"Will you take a word of advice from me?"

"What is it?"

"Give up this wild life and return to your home."

The young woman laughed in a hollow, scornful way.

"Do you think I would creep back to the parents who thrust me from them like some foul leper? Not I! Nugget Nell has more spirit than that."

"The poor fools!" Dick grated. "It would do me good to read them a lecture. But, have you taken in what I said? If I were free to love and wed—Do you not comprehend?"

"Heavens! Then you are not free?"

"I am not. Listen, and if you are a true woman you will respect me in what I say, and accept the situation."

The girl's face became hard in its lines.

"Tell me," she said.

"Well, let me ask, first, what is your intention if I tell you what you propose is impossible?"

"You have told me that already. I have told you that I love you, and I mean it. If I cannot have your love, no other woman shall."

"Then you will leave me here, to be dealt with according to the pleasure of my foes? I cannot believe that you would take my life with your own hand, for that would be poor satisfaction."

"We will die together, Deadwood Dick."

Dick read in her eyes that she meant it, and also that her mind was not right.

Whatever her trouble had been, and it was evidently just as she had explained, it had turned her brain.

"How much time will you give me to decide?" he asked.

"Five minutes," was the answer. "You can decide one way or the other in that time."

"Will you not give me twenty-four hours?"

"That would be too late. They will hang you at daylight, if you are here and alive then."

"Then, by accepting your offer, proving false to myself and to everything else in the world, you would save my life?"

"I would—I will," was the answer. "We will get away from here together, and no one here will ever hear of us again. We live together, Dick, or together we die."

"But, can you not understand from what I have said that it is impossible for me to make you my wife?"

"Then you have a wife?"

"I have."

"That settles it. I could be nothing to you, if not your lawful wife, so we must die together. I will not allow another to possess you."

"Listen, Nell: Deadwood Dick is no coward, and has faced death too many times to be afraid of it now. I have the best, the truest wife man ever had, and under no consideration would I be false to her, not even to save my life. On the other hand, I am not so mean a cur as to gain my freedom by making false promises to you. What you have proposed is simply impossible. Do you not see that it is?"

The young woman's fair head had dropped forward upon her breast, and she was for a moment silent.

When she looked up, tears were in her eyes, and she said:

"I see that it is impossible. I am done with life."

CHAPTER XIV.

DICK'S TIMELY DELIVERANCE.

DEADWOOD DICK was in an unpleasant situation, truly.

Not only was he powerless to prevent the girl from doing the rash act she contemplated, but his own life was in danger.

Even as she spoke, Nell took a revolver from a pocket in a fold of her dress and toyed with it, cocking it and rubbing her hand along its smooth and polished barrel.

Dick did not long delay speaking.

If possible, he must dissuade the girl from the deed she intended doing.

"Before you put an end to things, Nellie," he said, "let us consider the matter further. After you shoot it will be too late."

She was seated on the ground beside him, and at this she laid down the weapon and leaned forward as if hoping that her threat had led him to change his mind, or as if a new hope had been born.

"What have you to say?" she sadly asked.

"I have always held," Dick made response, "that the person who commits suicide does both a foolish thing, and a cowardly act."

"On that point we do not agree. What if the future has no hope in it, is it worth while to live on in dark despair? I think not."

"The future," rejoined Dick, "is something that we cannot see. Persons have, in a dark hour, killed themselves, when, had they lived a day longer—in some cases even an hour longer—everything would have been bright again in their lives."

"They could not worry about what they never knew, that is certain."

"Nor could they recall the rash act, no matter how necessary it might be for them to do so were it possible."

"But, what reason have I to live longer?" asked the girl.

"For the very reason," answered Dick, "that you do not know what the future has for you."

"Can you see anything bright in the prospect?"

"I cannot see one way or the other. A day may bring you more happiness than you have ever dreamed of."

"My dream of happiness ends here, Deadwood Dick. I have loved you long, and had long hoped to meet you and win your love in return. Now that we have met, it is to learn that you have a wife."

"That dream is folly," said Dick. "You will soon forget me in the love of some more

worthy man, Nugget Nell. However, and be the outcome what it may, I must be true to the woman who is my wife, and whom I love with all the force of my nature. You would be—"

Dick saw a shadowy form creeping toward them, the form of a woman.

Not a sound did the moving figure make, but came on like a shadow in fact, and straight toward Nugget Nell.

"I would be—what?" the girl asked.

"You would be foolish to kill yourself for so hopeless a cause."

"Because it is hopeless is the strongest reason why I should kill myself," was the argument. "I shall only change my mind in one particular."

"And in what is that?"

"I shall let you live. That will be proof that I loved you."

"You love me, and yet would leave me here bound and helpless, to be hanged to-morrow? A strange love that is."

"I dare not free you, for I know you would balk my purpose. But, stay; I will free your feet, and you will be able to help yourself more then. I must not delay."

"I wanted to talk with you further, Nell," Dick still parleyed, to gain time.

The woman was stealing nearer and nearer, step by step, and Dick was moving about restlessly, in order to disguise any noise she might make.

He knew not who she was, but she had lifted her finger in warning to him, and he believed that her intention was to rescue the misguided young woman before she could do herself harm.

"What more would you say to me?" the girl asked.

"I wanted to question you about this camp of Corduroy Crossing."

"There would be little use in that, for I would not disclose the secrets of the island to you."

"Not even had I been able to grant your wish?"

"In that case I would have done your bidding no matter what the risk or cost, Dick."

"What was meant by what Tiger Bill said to-night, about the coming of the yellow? What did he refer to that he called the 'yellow'?"

"I cannot tell you. You will never know, for by the time you get out of here the cloud, as they called it, will have passed. But, enough, for my mind is fully made up. Think of me as one—"

She had taken up the revolver, and was turning it toward herself, when the woman behind her sprung forward and seized her.

The weapon was discharged, but the bullet did no harm, and the next moment Nugget Nell was lying on her back with the other woman holding her there by sheer force.

At the same time heavy steps were heard running toward the spot.

In a moment a rough-looking man, evidently a miner, was on hand, and Nugget Nell was quickly bound.

That done, Dick's rescuers, as they may be called, and certainly the rescuers of the infatuated girl, rose to their feet and looked at Dick.

Dick was now able to get a good view of them, and he took them to be a miner and his wife. The reader, of course, will guess who they were, by this impression they made upon Dick.

"Et do look ez ef you was in somethin' of a fix, friend," the woman spoke, in a cracked voice.

"That's what et do, fer dust," agreed the man. "I opine we'll have ter help ye out of et, won't we? Seems like we was jest in time, too."

"You were just in time to cheat me out of a happy ending to a miserable existence," cried Nugget Nell. "Free me, just for one moment, and let me finish my career here and now."

"No; it must not be!" said Dick, sternly. "If you are friends, release me, and we will care for this misguided girl. Who are you, anyhow?"

"Well, I hail to ther name of Ben West," answered the man, "and this hyar is my better half, Bet-y Jane. She is a whooper-up, is Betsy Jane, and you owe this rescue to her."

"Jest like you ter say so, Benjamin," the woman modestly retorted.

"Well, allow me to extend a vote of thanks to both of you, anyhow," said Dick. "Will you free me?"

"Sartainly," answered the man.

He made no delay about it, but severed Dick's bonds at once, and the Prince of the West was once more upon his feet and ready for action.

"I'm greatly obliged to you," he said. "Now, will you take care of this young woman and see that she does not come to any harm? You must

guard against her doing harm to herself, you know."

"Yes, we know," observed the woman.

"You overheard our talk, then?"

"A good deal of it, anyhow; enough to show that you are true to an absent wife."

"You heard enough, then, to have pity for the young woman. Do what you can for her till I can have her taken care of somehow."

"And what are you going to do?" asked the man.

"I have further business at the camp of Corduroy Crossing," replied Dick.

"Don't you know that it would be death for you to go there?" demanded the woman.

"No, I do not know that it would," responded the detective. "I have been in tight places too often to be afraid. But, tell me something about yourselves. Do you belong at this camp?"

"No," answered the woman, "we don't. But, come with us, and perhaps we can be of some help to you. We stand ready to offer our services, and you won't miss anything by knowing more of us, anyhow."

Dick noted that her manner had changed.

"I know already that you are not what you seem," he declared.

"Then," cried the woman, "know me for what I am. I have no further need for this disguise."

With a few quick movements her outer dress fell off, showing another of rich crimson under it, and putting on her mask and a hat on her head, there stood Captain Crimson.

Deadwood Dick looked the surprise he felt.

"Whoever you are," he declared, "you are no slouch at that business."

"And would you know who I am, too?" asked the man. "I will show you in a few brief moments."

He stepped away a few paces into the shadows, and when he returned Dick recognized at once the man whose life he had saved, Waterstone!

"This is an agreeable surprise," Dick cried, extending his hand. "Now I can fully understand why you accepted the chance to get away from our enemies."

"It was to come back and try another shy at them," was the response. "But, I must ask you to give all the credit to this lady, sir. It was she who tracked you here. Instinct seemed to lead her."

"How did you strike my trail here?"

"We called at the hotel," was the woman's response, "and learned that you were not there. We next made a circuit of the camp, but with no result. When we returned toward the hotel I observed this young woman leave it and having noticed her manner toward you before, told myself that she was looking for you, or else knew where you were, and was going to you."

"And by following her you found me."

"You are right. But, come; this is a poor place to remain in."

"I beg you leave me here," cried Nugget Nell. "Leave me here to die. I do not want to live."

"You are wrong," spoke Captain Crimson. "I am a woman, and I am your friend. You must go with me, willingly or not, for your own good."

Weeping and protesting, the girl would have remained, but her struggles were of no avail, and she was forced to accompany the trio out and off in the direction of the shore.

When the shore of the lake was reached, a short walk brought them to the spot under the bluff where Captain Crimson's men were waiting, and there, as soon as Nugget Nell had been made as comfortable as possible, a consultation was held.

Said Captain Crimson:

"Now, Deadwood Dick, we happen to know something about your business here, and want to help you. This gentleman, Mr. Waterstone, is really Ben West, the noted detective of whom you have heard—"

"Ben West!" cried Dick. "Is it possible?"

CHAPTER XV.

DISCOVERING THE MYSTERY.

THE two detectives grasped hands for a hearty shake.

They were not unknown to each other by reputation, for West was a man who had done some remarkably clever work.

As for Deadwood Dick, his name was known from ocean to ocean, and from border to border. It was a household word everywhere, and the rogues' terror.

"We may as well have an understanding before we proceed further," suggested Dick, after some remarks had been exchanged. "I can understand that you are here on business, West, and that Captain Crimson and her men are your allies—"

"You make a mistake there," West interrupted. "I never saw Captain Crimson or her men before in my life, till they came into the camp to our rescue. She will tell you this is so. We are however, allies now, for the purpose of helping you out in whatever you have on hand."

"Is it possible? Then, Captain Crimson, may I inquire who and what you are? Since we are to work together you can have no good reason for withholding the truth concerning yourself."

"I must remain unknown for the present," was the response. "And, if you will excuse me, I will retire a few minutes while you talk."

With that she walked away along the shore of the lake, presently stopping and bathing her face in the cool water.

"What business brought you here?" asked Dick of his fellow-detective.

"I was sent here to learn something about this wild hole," was the response. "I haven't learned much yet, however. What brought you here?"

"The same errand," Dick answered. "I came to play a lone hand, so to say, and would have carried it out, too, if I could have persuaded Nugget Nell to release me. I might have got downed, however."

"I believe you would; in fact, there is a prospect that we shall all get downed, as you call it. This is as bad a hole as I ever set foot into. Well, have you been able to learn anything?"

"No; but I expect to learn something this night."

"And what is that?"

"You heard Tiger Bill speak about the 'yellow,' did you not?"

"Yes; and I wondered what he meant by it, too. What do you imagine he referred to?"

"I have been puzzling my head to guess. Naturally, one would think he means gold, but that does not seem to be it, all things considered."

"I agree with you. Well, it is our business to learn, anyhow. It must be high time the mystery arrived, I should think. What is to be our plan of action? We must have it understood."

Nugget Nell here spoke up.

"Deadwood Dick," she said, "if you will allow me to go free I will explain this mystery to you."

"What use will you make of your freedom, Nell, if I grant it to you on that condition?" Dick asked.

"That I will not tell you; but set me free and let me go and I will tell you all."

"You would be free now, were it not for your own good," said Dick, kindly.

"If I promise not to take my life will you let me go?"

"Would you keep that promise?"

"Yes, I will."

"I am afraid to trust you, in your present state of mind."

"You need have no fears, for the word of Nugget Nell is never broken," the girl assured.

"What is this about?" asked Captain Crimson, now returning.

Dick told her what had been said.

"It must not be," she immediately decided.

"For her own good we must hold the young woman with us. We are her best friends. She is not her own friend now, and is not responsible for her acts."

"I agree with you, Lady Crimson," spoke up West.

"And I am inclined the same way myself," assented Dick. "We cannot let you go, Nellie."

The girl captive turned away her face, with tears in her eyes plainly seen in the light of the one torch the group held.

A comfortable place had been arranged for her, as said, with blankets, close under the edge of the bluff, and she could not escape without help.

The two detectives, with Captain Crimson and her men, held a conference, and arranged their plans as far as was possible, ignorant as they were of what work was before them.

They had about come to the conclusion to remain where they were until morning, with men on guard watching for anything that might occur at the camp, when some peculiar sounds out upon the waters of the lake claimed their attention. Immediately all looked in the direction of the sounds, and listened.

"What do you make out of it?" asked Detective West.

"It has the sound of a small army crossing the lake in boats," suggested Dick.

"There are certainly boats," Captain Crimson agreed. "This must be the arrival of the expected mystery."

"I believe you," agreed Dick. "Now is the time for action, I think, or at any rate, of preparation for action. Am I to have command?"

"Yes; that is understood."

"Well, then, men, mount and hold yourselves in readiness. Captain Crimson, I think you had better remain with your men while West and I go forward to learn what we can."

"No, sir; I do not agree to that," was the firm reply. "My lieutenant will take charge of the men, and I will go with you. You will understand better my reason for this later on. Those boats are heading for the hotel."

"You are right; and, bark! the camp is awake and making for the shore. Whatever the mystery is, it is at hand now."

A few hurried words all around, and the trio, Dick, West and Captain Crimson, left the shelter of the bluff and moved forward toward the hotel.

When they passed out from under the bluff they saw the citizens of Corduroy Crossing hastening toward the lake-shore, with many torches, and all was excitement and uproar.

By the reflection their lights cast upon the lake, the outlines of the coming boats could be seen.

There appeared to be at least six of them, and every one was full of persons.

"A strange thing to call a yellow cloud," remarked Ben West.

"I don't know about it," responded Dick.

"You suspect what it is?" asked Captain Crimson.

"Yes; listen."

Voices came to them from the boats, in a strange tongue.

"Chinamen!" the woman in crimson exclaimed.

"That is it," returned Dick. "They are what was termed the 'yellow.'"

"And what does it mean?" asked West.

"Smuggling," was Dick's decisive answer.

"By the stars!" cried West, "you have hit it! Why could we not think of that before?"

"Because it is a new thing," assumed Dick. "I see through it now. The Celestials are larded on Canadian soil, and then they are smuggled over the border into the States."

"And there is big money in it, I'll bet," West added.

"Undoubtedly. Somebody will be here to pay for them, and we must bag the lot of them."

"It is going to be a dangerous bit of work," declared Captain Crimson. "Had we not better put it off until daylight?"

"You are right about the danger of it," agreed Dick. "As to putting it off till morning, that will depend on what is done with the Chinamen."

"If they attempt to get them away to-night, then we must go for them," added West. "If not, if they camp down here, then we may let it rest over till we have daylight."

By this time the several boats had reached the shore, and the Chinamen, for such they were, were landing.

Each boat-load, consisting of half a dozen, was taken off by itself, and men put in charge of the "yellow" contraband.

Double-face Duncan, Bleezer Googin, Tiger Bill and others were prominent in the work, and their voices were heard giving orders and directions.

Finally, when the last boat had been unloaded, the boats were pulled up on the shore far enough to be out of danger of getting away, and all set off in the direction of the camp center.

The Chinamen were fresh from their own flowery land, as was plain to be seen, and were as helpless as so many geese.

When they had gone some distance, Dick asked Captain Crimson to signal to the horsemen to come up.

This was done, and the seven horsemen were soon at hand, when Dick gave them instructions what to do.

Dick, West and the woman in crimson went up the dark street, then, in the direction the crowd had gone, and the horsemen followed them cautiously.

By this time the crowd had reached the Howler Saloon, and the lights disappearing showed that they were entering that establishment, and by the time Dick and his helpers reached the place everybody was within.

The saloon was lighted up, and by looking in at the windows Dick and his friends were able to see what was going on.

The Chinamen were huddled like sheep in one corner, while at the bar were the boatmen in-

dulging in poison after their exertions on the lake.

Tiger Bill, the mayor, and some strangers were engaged in a business transaction at one of the tables. Money was exchanging hands, and the mayor and Bill were getting it.

"What better chance to bag them than here and now?" whispered Deadwood Dick to those with him.

"As well now as any other time," assented West.

"And dangerous at any time," warned the woman in crimson. "But, count me in if you decide to go for them."

"I do not think we can have a better chance to gather them all," said Dick. "We can go in front and rear at the same time, and the man who offers resistance will have to drop."

"All right!" agreed Captain Crimson. "I will inform the men and bring them up. There is only one favor I have to ask, Deadwood Dick."

"And what is that?" Dick inquired.

"That I may fight by your side, if fight we must."

"Why do you make that request?"

"For the same reason Nugget Nell gave for her strange conduct toward you. *Because I love you!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

DEADWOOD DICK SURPRISED.

THE woman in crimson was gone in an instant, and Deadwood Dick could only gaze after her in amazement.

Had all the women suddenly gone mad? What did it mean, anyhow? What was he to this woman in crimson? The last a question he could not answer.

"She seems hard hit," remarked Detective West.

"I don't know what to make of her," responded Dick. "She is a mystery to me."

"A good chance for you to exercise your detective skill," was the suggestion offered.

"And I'll do it, too, when we get this matter off our hands," Dick declared. "I'll know who and what our Captain Crimson is."

Interest being centered within the saloon, there was nobody outside to take note of what was going on, and Captain Crimson came back with her horsemen without having been discovered.

Dick and West met her a little distance from the door.

"Now," Dick directed, "you, West, take three of these men and go to the rear door and be ready to enter as soon as you hear me order their hands up."

"All right," was the response. "Take care to send no bullets into us, however."

"I'll see to that; you use the same precaution."

"You bet."

Other details having been considered, they parted, and Dick waited until the others were behind the saloon before he advanced.

When they had disappeared, then he and Captain Crimson went to the front door, and when all were there and ready, Dick threw open the door and sprung in, with the woman in crimson at his side.

And immediately after them thundered the horsemen, with rifles all ready for action, taking the crowd completely by surprise.

"Hands up, you rascals!" cried Deadwood Dick.

There was a moment of confusion, and many made a dash for the rear door.

Before they reached it, however, in sprung West and his men, and the order was repeated from that direction.

"Surrender!" Deadwood Dick ordered, sternly, "or the worse for you! We will stand no foolishness, be sure of that. Hands up, now!"

There stood Dick and Captain Crimson, side by side, each with a brace of revolvers in hand, and on each side of them were two horsemen with their rifles to the fore.

The sudden surprise, and the prompt action, had rendered it impossible for the crowd to think about defense, and now it was too late, as every man of them realized, and the majority of hands went promptly up.

The Chinamen looked on, from their corner, with their almond eyes dilated to the utmost extent.

"Deadwood Dick, by ther great b'goshtum!" cried Bleezer Googin. "What did I tell ye, Double-face? Ain't ye sorry ye didn't string him?"

"By the 'tarnel goshness!" cried the mayor, "et may not be too late yet, ef we git half

a chance. They ain't got us yet, me boyees, and it's our business ter see that they don't."

"Don't flatter yourselves that way," cautioned Dick. "We have got you hard and fast enough. If any man in the crowd attempts to escape, or to draw a weapon, he will drop in his tracks. Don't make any mistake on that point."

"And death is just as certain from this quarter as it is from in front," added Detective West. "Hadn't we better order them to form in lines, Bristol, and then disarm them?"

"A good idea," Dick agreed. "Range yourselves into four lines, citizens, and be as quick about it as you can. And don't forget the warning that has been given you. We hold the life of every man of you in our hands, and upon your own behavior will depend your fate."

Growling and cursing among themselves, yet with hands obediently aloft, the rascals obeyed the command, and were soon standing in four ranks.

"Now," ordered West, "two of you men pass through and disarm them. If they make a move to harm you, down they'll go."

"Hold on," cried Captain Crimson; "that won't do."

"Why not?" asked Dick.

"It won't do to put one of our men in danger of our bullets, for they might hold him and begin fight, thinking we wouldn't fire for fear of hitting him."

"Cusses on you!" grated the mayor.

"That's so," cried West, "and I am too hasty with my directions. I must weigh matters more carefully. I'll make them advance, one at a time, and lay down their weapons here on the floor."

"That is a good deal better," assented the woman.

And that, accordingly, was done, and the men were soon disarmed.

"And now make them secure," Captain Crimson ordered. "Bind them every one, and with care."

"It seems to me I am taking a back seat in this matter," observed Dick, with a smile. "I am still near enough to the front to attend to business, however."

He directed the men to bind the principal rascals in the crowd, and all the others having been thoroughly disarmed, there was little to be feared from any of them now.

"There you are!" cried Dick, when the last one had been attended to. "We have caught you dead to rights, my fine fellows, and I think you will go below for a little while. Uncle Sam has had his eye on you for a considerable time, and at last he has got hold of you."

"I'd like ter settle wi' you, man ter man!" grated Tiger Bill.

"Your case is settled already, Tiger," responded Dick.

"And I'd like ter have jest a quiet half-hour wi' ye," chimed in the mayor.

"I am wary how I deal with double-faced persons," was Dick's remark, with a laugh.

"You will get no mercy, and no chance to escape, be sure of that," was the verdict of Captain Crimson. "You are in the power of Deadwood Dick, if you know what *that* means."

"Thanks to you, lady," said Dick. "Are you ready to tell me who you are?"

"I want ter chip in a word hyar!" broke out Bleezer Googin. "How did ye git out of ther fix we left ye in, Dickey?"

"That will be something for you to ponder over," was the retort.

"What is Nugget Nell?" demanded the mayor.

"Yas, what is that gal?" echoed Tiger.

"She is where harm cannot come to her," Captain Crimson answered. "We are going to see her through."

"Then you have taken her prisoner, hey?" the mayor cried. "I want ter say right hyar that that 'ar gal is as innercent as a posey, she aire, and you ain't got nothin' erg'inst her."

"That's what's ther matter!" cried the crowd.

A sudden idea came to Dick, an idea how to learn more about that mysterious girl.

"She deserves the same fate as the rest of you, beyond doubt," he declared, "and that is what she will get, you bet!"

"I tell ye et ain't so!" cried the mayor. "She is an angel, that gal is, and curses on ther man that does her harm. She hadn't nothin' ter do with our doin's, and ther boyees will say so."

"That's so," cried the crowd. "That's ther truth."

"She will have to prove that," Dick rejoined. The others understood what he was after, and were silent while he had it out with the mayor.

"An' she can do that, by ther hull lot of us, the mayor hastened to say. "I kin swear to et,

fer one. She was here as our good-luck mascot, so ter say, and we was under her thumb, every man of us. Ther ain't a bad hair in that gal's head, and ef you ar' a man you won't harm her."

"I'm glad to learn so much about her," said Dick, now. "We have no intention of doing anything but good for the poor girl. Am I not right, Captain Crimson?"

"You are right, Dick," was the answer.

This was said in a changed voice, and Dick started and stared hard at the masked woman.

"Who and what are you, Captain Crimson?" he demanded.

"I think the time is ripe for me to make myself known to you, Dick," was the response. "Behold!" and with that she tore away her mask. Captain Crimson was his own wife—the matchless Kodak Kate.

Deadwood Dick's face was a study, for that one second, and he exclaimed almost wildly:

"Kate! My wife!"

She it was indeed, and she laughed at his amazement.

"It is I, my brave Richard," she responded.

"Maybe you will not insist upon leaving me behind again."

Dick now caught her in his arms, and after a moment said:

"But, Kate, think of the danger you have run. Think of the risk you took in coming here. It might have been fatal for you."

"Think of your own risk," was the return.

"I knew you were coming here to play a lone hand against this evil place, and I resolved not to allow you to do it. I engaged some trusty men, secretly, and followed you. Here they are, brave and faithful fellows, every one. Let me introduce you to Kodak Kate's Secret Seven."

"I would not have believed it of you, Kate," was all Dick could say. "You are more and more of a wonder to me every hour. After this you shall suit yourself about sharing my dangers. I will never force you out of an adventure again. You are a second self to me, and where I am, there it seems to me is your natural place. You seem to fit in that way, my better half."

Ben West now came forward, and Dick introduced him.

"I could never have suspected such a thing," he declared. "Why, Bristol, I confess to you that I was half in love with Captain Crimson myself. I congratulate you upon the possessing of so noble and brave a wife."

"This has been a surprise, which I shall remember for many a day," assured Dick. "I came here to play a lone hand, as Kate said, thinking her safely at the hotel where I had left her, and congratulating myself upon the fact of my not bringing her to so wild a hole as this. Little I dreamed that she was near me all the time. Kate, you are a wonder. You are a detective born. When you could deceive me like that, what are you not capable of?"

During the ensuing twenty minutes Dick and his brave wife were the center of attraction, while they were engaged in conversation.

While they were talking, nothing further was done with the prisoners, though the men kept them carefully under guard.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

FINALLY the prisoners were given into the keeping of some of the men, others taking charge of the Chinamen, and Dick and his helpers began to consider the business of removing them on the morrow.

Plans were laid, and after that a short sleep was sought. At an early hour all were astir, and preparations were begun for departure. The whole camp having been disarmed and most of the weapons destroyed, men were willing enough to lend their aid in getting away, on promise of freedom.

Nugget Nell had been cared for, of course, and Kodak Kate had her in keeping, treating her with all the gentleness a sister could bestow. And the girl was not insensible to it, but returned the evidence of affection strongly, the truth of Kate's relationship to Dick having been made known to her. She lent great aid in getting the men to help Dick in every way he required their services.

All the provisions of the camp had been collected and packed, and by noon the big company moved, leaving Corduroy Crossing a deserted place save for Tripham Marker, proprietor of the Bang-up Hotel, who had insisted upon remaining in charge of his property, since Dick had nothing against him, and Nugget Nell had vouched for his innocence in all the evil work the others had been engaged in. By night a good

Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Lone Hand.

many miles had been covered, and a few days' travel brought them to their destination.

The case was the sensation of the day, and Dick's work on it was highly praised, the praises being shared among his brave helpers. He had broken up a business that might have grown to alarming proportions, and his first theory in regard to the Chinamen was proven to have been correct. They had been landed on British soil and then brought across the border into the States, where certain men paid so much per head for them and made them virtually slaves. These men met their just reward, and those at the camp who had been actively concerned in the business were given their just deserts.

When Dick had wiped his hands of the business and he and Kate had taken farewell leave of Detective West, the "tandem team," as Dick and Kate were called—a name that had been given them before, and which seemed likely to stick to them—went with the gambler girl, Nugget Nell, to her native place. There Dick called upon her parents, to induce them to take the girl back again, and found them only too willing to do so. They were in sorrow at having turned her away, and received her with open arms. It was a happy reunion, and the past was wiped out with happy tears.

When Dick and Kate took their leave Nell pressed their hands in gratitude, and said she should ever remember them as the truest friends she had ever found. And so, that accomplished, Dick and Kate went forth once more on their mission of combined adventure, duty and the accumulation of the wealth necessary to ease when the day for enforced rest came.

THE END.

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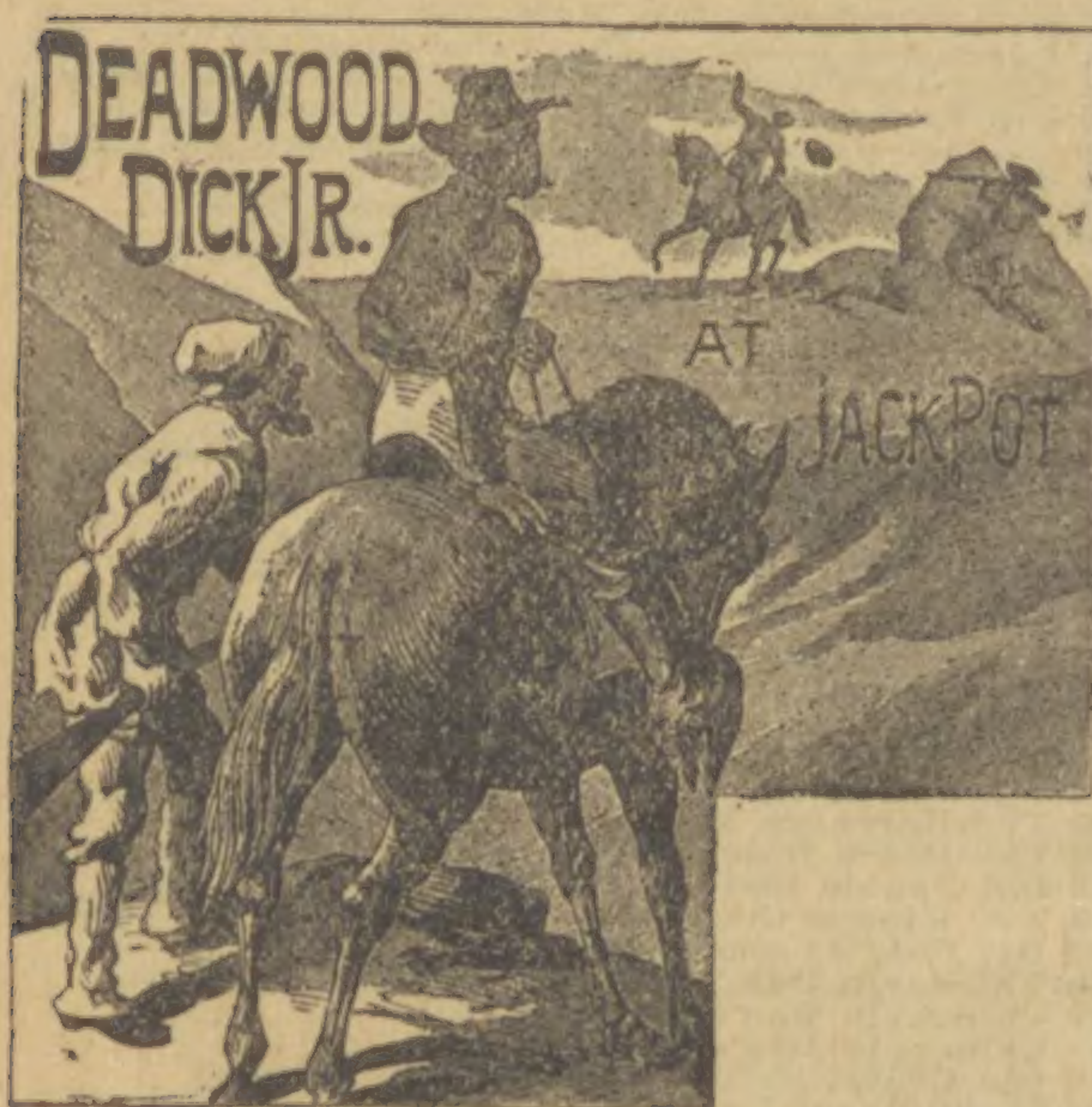
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